

'We are open to criticism'

Nov 26 FEB 2002

Excerpts of a dialogue between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and university students in the UK, held at London's Imperial College on Sunday. Report by CAROLYN HONG

Question from Dr Arun Subramaniam, a doctor with the Great Ormond Hospital in London: Many medical students on Defence Ministry scholarships now want to leave medicine and are willing to pay. But the Ministry has refused because they are commissioned officers.

PM: There is a shortage of doctors in the armed forces and there has to be some means of keeping them. It's only for a short period. Those on scholarship may have to serve a bit longer but eventually, they will be released.

I advise them to have a bit of patience. They have to serve their own country. We now have doctors from everywhere because Malaysian doctors do not want to work in the armed forces. We have to sacrifice. I gave up medicine in order to become Prime Minister. But I had studied medicine, it was tedious, and I thought that the rest of my life, I would be a doctor. I served as a doctor for 20 long years before I became a full-time politician. I cannot be a doctor again. I would like to but ... they want me to sit again for the exam!

I will study (this request) but I won't promise anything.

Question from a University College London student who wanted to remain anonymous: Several corporate restruc-

We are still learning and are willing to listen to others on how to manage the problems. We are not shy to admit it when we have done wrong.

The results are now showing, the share market is performing better.

Question from Shariza Ashween Mohd Ashraf, Bar student at the Inns of Court School of Law: Protectionism in the legal sector has resulted in Malaysia losing young lawyers to international legal firms.

PM: While lawyers don't like protectionism, they want to be protected from foreign lawyers. We have lost a lot of brain, regardless of the conditions at home. Some become comfortable in the country where they study, and they like to remain there.

I came back (from Singapore). Many of my friends stayed back, and made more money. We know that there is a brain drain but we can't fully stop it. Malaysia is a good place to live (but) anywhere you live, you will find that the policies are not exactly as you like.

You win some, lose some, wherever you are. I won't like to live in England, it's so cold! In Malaysia, I can wear a shirt, no tie. You may sweat a little but the cost of *dobi* (laundry services) is low.

I just went to Antarctica, I

PM: We can't tolerate

Nov 26 FEB 2002

□ FROM PAGE 10

mismanagement

We went into Perwaja with our eyes wide open, we were prepared to lose money but unfortunately, we had made too many mistakes. At first, we thought that civil servants should run the company but they had no idea about running a steel mill.

Subsequently, we brought a businessman to run it, and he too caused a lot of losses. It is believed that he has mismanaged and taken money from the company.

We had already investigated this. But unfortunately, the money that was supposed to have been taken out, is not easily located because it is said to be in a Swiss Bank account but the Swiss authorities are not willing to reveal who the account-holders are.

They are very secretive about the accounts, and they are not going to co-operate. But they do admit that there were some funds but we need them to give evidence in our court.

We didn't plan Sept 11. We found that Malaysians were going to Pakistan and Afghanistan to learn how to overthrow the Government ...

This, they are not willing to do.

And many of the other things done are done in foreign countries, and we are not getting the kind of co-operation that we need in our investigation. We are still continuing with our investigation, and if there is any evidence at all, we will bring the people to court and they have to face the consequences of their mismanagement and misappropriation of funds.

RM10 billion is a lot of money. But we must accept that losses will be incurred in industrialising Malaysia.

As for MAS, it was doing well until the recession of 1997. Today, all airlines, including British Airlines, are losing money especially after Sept 11. MAS suffered from the same thing, the Government had to move in and take back the company. We paid a handsome sum of money to acquire it.

The present management has discovered certain misappropriation of funds, and certain activities that were not sanctioned by the Board. A report to the police was made, even though the previous owner is said to be a crony of the Government.

It doesn't prevent us from acting. We can't tolerate any deliberate misappropriation of funds or misma-

agement, crony or otherwise.

Question from Puvanavar Mailvaganam, LLM in International Sports Law student in Anglia Polytechnic University: Lim Kit Siang (DAP national chairman) had said you are taking advantage of Sept 11 to get more support.

PM: We didn't plan Sept 11. We found that Malaysians were going to Pakistan and Afghanistan to learn how to overthrow the Government, we thought they went there to study religion.

Then, an assemblyman (Dr Joe) Fernandez was shot dead. There were some bank robberies and some little bombs exploded. We didn't know why, eventually, there was a botched bank robbery. One robber was injured and was arrested.

He confessed that they were planning to overthrow the Government to set up an Islamic Government *a la* Taliban. He confessed they had learnt how to overthrow the Government and rob banks.

To them, it is legitimate to rob banks because its money from *riba* (usury). Then came Sept 11. That came later, we arrested them before that. The accusation by Lim Kit Siang is sheer nonsense, we have no

wish to use terrorism to gain votes. But if people realise that what we were doing is right and give us votes, who are we to say no?

Question from Mohd Jamil Fitri Kamsin, electrical engineering student from University of Manchester's Institute of Science and Technology: How does the Government plan to raise revenue when duties are reduced?

PM: We have been asked to cut import duties. Today, the duties on a Mercedes Benz is 300 per cent, so that we can develop our own automotive industry. That's why we worry about removing taxes.

Today, our engineering capacity is high and we want to retain that,

that's why we avoid accepting globalisation completely.

We accepted Afta, but they agreed that cars with 40 per cent local content is a local car and eligible for lowered import duty. Our car is 90 per cent local and the cost is higher, we can't compete with cars that are essentially Japanese or Korean. So, we had asked for a delay in implementation. Other things, we think we can manage.

As for Government revenue, it's possible that if we remove some import duties, business will be stirred up and the Government makes more money (from corporate taxes).

Question from Kartina Ibrahim, Masters student in Tourism Marketing in Surrey University: Can the Government offer me a grant to set up an institute to train school

dropouts?

PM: You have to do that on your own, the Government just gives support by sending students to good institutions. I can't say that you will get a budget.

My advice is to work in the private tourist agencies in Malaysia to gain practical experience and if you see an opportunity, you can have a go. But you will have to raise your own capital.