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Heed history, says Dr M (HL)

Firdaus Abdullah; Shahrum Sayuthi

PASIR GUDANG, Sat. - Learn from history and do not forget the mistakes of our past - this was Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's heartfelt advice to young Malaysians today.

The Prime Minister said history had shown that unity among the people enabled Malaysia to attain independence in 1957.

History also shows that past mistakes resulted in our being colonised for 450 years, he said to a gathering of more than 7,000 students and student leaders at the National Secondary School Student Leaders Patriotic Assembly here today.

"We have only been independent for 45 years now, which is just one tenth of the period of colonisation our nation has experienced," he said.

This is why interracial unity is the most important factor determining our future, he added.

The Prime Minister said younger generations of Malaysians could only defend the country if they are united. Without unity, Malaysians would not be able to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to allow us to compete with others.

"We might have originated from Indonesia, we might have originated from Java or Aceh, we might be from China or India, but our nation now is Malaysia and we must act like Malaysians.

"Malaysia is different from our countries of origin, but we are not going to erase racial identity in this country. In fact, we accord an unprecedented level of racial freedom here which is non-existent in other countries."

He said many Western nations never actually encouraged or accorded the freedom to other nationalities who migrated to their countries.

On the other hand, "we are very tolerant. Appreciate this tolerance of ours, put 'tight' racial sentiments aside and, instead, focus on the unity of our multi-racial society."

"Only then can we close ranks and stand as a Bangsa Malaysia that will defend this nation of ours at all costs," Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said to thunderous applause.

He reminded the students that the "real" Malaysian society was not confined to any single race but a coexistence of the various races.

"If we are patriotic, united and strive to master knowledge then our country will continue to be free and independent. We could be on par with if not better than other races or nations."

Making his address after an enthralling musical sketch on the struggles of Malay nationalist Datuk Onn Jaafar, Dr Mahathir said it was the younger generation's responsibility to continue the struggle for a secure future. "It all depends on you."

Dr Mahathir said that in conjunction with the National Day celebrations, students must renew their resolve and commitment to safeguard the nation's independence.

The Prime Minister warned students that attacks against the nation would continue, but such attacks could be thwarted by Malaysians with a strong spirit and ability.

Later, speaking in front of more than 5,000 Universiti Teknologi Malaysia staff and students, Dr Mahathir said it was not impossible for the country to be colonialised again if Malaysians were lackadaisical and failed to take steps to face presentday challenges.

"The former colonial masters are planning to colonise us again.

"I don't think those who wish to rule us will send `war machinery' as they did in 1511 but they can do it via other means.

"They can colonise us by just making us poorer ...this has been applied; they tried, but we resisted such attempts. But nothing will stop them from coming again," Dr Mahathir warned, adding that it was not a "fairy tale" but a reality which should be understood by all.

He said such threats would come through economic, political and even social aspects. "Now they can just accuse you of being less democratic or of not adhering to human rights and then initiate moves to change the Government or leaders according to their whims and fancies.

"This is exactly what is happening in Palestine and Iraq."