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PM on the new Malay dilemma (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Malaysian Malays are now faced with two new dilemmas, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight: whether they should continue to depend on the affirmative action policies they have grown used to, and whether they understand the true teachings of Islam.

At a dinner for the Harvard Club of Malaysia, Dr Mahathir said one dilemma was the struggle to build a strong, resilient and independent Malay race, while the other was a deflection of this attempt by the Opposition.

By not understanding their religion, Malays were in danger of supporting a party that would undermine the country's democracy, he said.

He said Malaysia, as a country committed to democracy, faced the danger of the wrong party being elected because of the "brainwashing" by the Opposition.

"We have seen this happening in many countries where populist parties have been elected by a gullible electorate. It is possible for this to happen to Malaysia. It is entirely possible for all the prosperity, stability and racial harmony to be destroyed."

He said the failure to build a strong Malay race was due to a culture that did not value hard work, risk-taking and patience.

"They are laid-back and prone to take the easy way out. And the easy way out is to sell off whatever they get and ask for more.

"The idea of quality is not commonly understood. The result is shoddy work. There is no pride.

Without the desire to continuously improve, there will be no progress," he said in his speech titled The New Malay Dilemma.

Dr Mahathir lamented the attitude of Malays in regarding the Government's affirmative-action policies as their birthright.

"Today, they lean on the crutches of Malay privileges to protect them. But crutches invariably weaken the users.

"Unfortunately, their view is that their crutches are symbols of their superior status. The sad thing is that they are not even using the crutches properly."

He said that when he wrote his book The Malay Dilemma in the late 1960s, he assumed that what the Malays lacked were opportunities to become successful.

When the New Economic Policy was implemented, Malays initially grabbed the opportunities offered them and worked hard, but their attitudes had changed.

Malay students now thought scholarships were their right, while Malay businessmen became sleeping or "Ali Baba" partners, exploiting opportunities for quick returns.

While there were a few serious and hardworking Malays, Dr Mahathir said the majority contributed nothing to the NEP target of 30 per cent Bumiputera equity in the national economy.

The few who were confident enough to think of doing away with privileges were generally regarded as traitors to the race, he added.

He also said that now, as in the past, Malays were reluctant to take up jobs and gave them away to foreign workers. Then, colonial powers had to bring in Indian and Chinese labour to work in plantations and mines. Now, Malays were not equipping themselves with education and new skills.

The Malays needed to change their mindset to view work as a reward in

itself.

But he added that change would take time, and meanwhile, the second dilemma was thwarting efforts to overcome the first.

"The Malays are deeply religious but they are not knowledgeable enough about Islam to distinguish between what is Islamic and what is not. Religious piety is highly valued ... but they equate piety with outward appearance and not the true teachings of the Quran and the true tradition of the Hadith.

"This simple perception of their religion opens opportunities for the unscrupulous to exploit religion for their own purpose."

Dr Mahathir said Opposition politicians had misinterpreted Islam and used its name to trap the Malays and make them narrow-minded.

He said Opposition followers were taught not to be thankful to the Government. Misdeeds by Opposition leaders were also readily justified or overlooked.

Dr Mahathir warned that this "Malay dilemma" affected all Malaysians. "Should we, in the name of democracy, allow the country to be destroyed, or should we ensure that people are not subjected to manipulations to the point where they will use democracy to destroy democracy?"

Dr Mahathir was accompanied by his wife, Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali. About 600 people, including Harvard alumni, attended the dinner.