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PM: Traitors betraying struggles of past leaders

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SHAH ALAM, Mon. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight those who believed that independence would remain forever without any effort to defend it could be considered traitors.

The Prime Minister said such individuals or groups were betraying the struggles of past leaders, who had fought hard and even lost their lives to achieve independence. "If we don't celebrate it, there's a big possibility that we will forget the joy of being independent and, even worse, in defending the freedom, and this can lead to us being re-colonised."

Speaking before more than 15,000 students at Universiti Teknologi Mara in conjunction with its Merdeka Festival, Dr Mahathir said what was important in defending the country was to appreciate the independence itself besides ensuring unity.

He said the people, especially university students, must arm themselves with knowledge in the fields of science, engineering and other disciplines that could help defend the country's independence.

"If we need to go to war, we will fight with our own strength. Only with knowledge can we invent our own weapons without depending on others," he said, adding that Malaysia must develop its own weapons industry to effectively defend the nation from foreign threats and to preserve its independence.

He declared tomorrow (Tuesday) a 'public' holiday for UiTM staff and students.