

28/07/2002

PM warns of racial extremism (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today warned the Chinese community against supporting racial extremism as this may force the Malays to turn to another form of extremism.

This, the Prime Minister and Barisan Nasional chairman said, would eventually lead to trouble between the races.

He told the thousands of delegates, observers and MCA leaders attending the 49th MCA annual general assembly at Dewan San Choon in Wisma MCA here that the nation would experience racial riots if enmity between the races was not addressed and instead allowed to grow.

"What we fear is that due to the extreme behaviour of certain Chinese groups now, the Malays may tend to support Malay extremists and Malay political parties which are extreme.

"Confrontations will take place, escalating to riots, as in 1969. Maybe the DAP will be unhappy with this statement but if we ignore history, we will be repeating the same mistakes," Dr Mahathir said, reminding the people of the indelible black spot in Malaysian history.

He warned that racial extremism within a community would lead to similar sentiments among others, resulting eventually in a public display of enmity.

"Extremism breeds extremism. When one race has people who are extreme and do not respect the feelings of other races, then the other races too will indulge in extremism.

"When one side expresses extremism, this will draw more extreme actions from the other race. Escalation (of extremism) will then take place ... leading to a public display of enmity," Dr Mahathir, who is Umno president, said.

Acknowledging that at present, Malay extremists had managed to garner support and inter-racial tolerance was waning, the Prime Minister said the Government was trying hard to enhance unity and inter-racial understanding among the younger generation as they were evidently drifting apart.

"But there are extremist groups from all races who are against the idea of racial integration in Malaysia. They want the younger generation to be separated so that they do not interact at all. Even schools cannot be close to each other!

"This is very dangerous for the nation. If we, the races of different cultures, do not learn to live together from a young age, then we cannot possibly achieve harmony when we grow up. Inter-racial relations will become very weak and we can be easily antagonised.

"In other countries, this leads to non-stop clashes and even war," he said, adding that the Government's noble aim of wanting to keep students of the various races closer had been politicised and negatively blown out of proportion.

"Unfortunately, the extremists have accused us of trying to eradicate Chinese schools and this has been politicised by the opposition, and at times even by parties in the BN itself," he said, reiterating that the Government had no intention and could not possibly close down Chinese schools.

Also present at the MCA assembly were deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and other BN component party leaders.

Earlier in his speech, MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik paid tribute to Dr Mahathir for his exemplary leadership and vision which had

enabled the Chinese in Malaysia to live in peace and achieve tremendous economic success.

Speaking at a Press conference later, Dr Mahathir said the Government would proceed with the Vision Schools concept to foster unity and racial understanding among the young. He said since national schools did not seem to interest the other communities, especially the Chinese, Vision Schools remained a good alternative to unite the younger generation.

"During my time, everybody was brought up together, Liong Sik, Pak Lah (Abdullah) ... we were brought up together. My neighbours were Chinese and Indians.

"In the university, I stayed in the same room with a Chinese student. I did not become less Malay or less Muslim, nor did he become less Chinese just because we stayed in the same room. But now the students cannot stay in the same room.

"We are not doing this (Vision schools) because of any one race, it is for the good of Malaysia," he said, voicing concern over the racial rift in society.

"You can go to different schools but at least play together, have some interaction, then you can develop close relations."

Dr Mahathir said the uncompromising stand and policies of the Malay and Chinese-based opposition parties could not promote racial integration, what more solve racial problems or tensions.

Asked about the seriousness of racial extremism in the country, Dr Mahathir said: "I think it is getting worse among the younger generation."