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Praise for concerned youth (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today commended the young people of Malaysia for being concerned enough to begin thinking about the future and said this was a good sign which would result in greater achievements.

"I am sure this is going to result in the desire to achieve greater things than those achieved by our forebears and ancestors," the Prime Minister said in his speech titled "Realising Vision 2020 - Where Do We Stand Today?" when launching the Young Professionals Chamber Malaysia's (Promuda) "Perspectives from the Past, Paradigms for the Future" Lecture Series.

Emphasising that the future is for the young, and that the old must go whether they want to or not, he said, youth by nature were idealistic and often impatient and sometimes this manifested itself in ways that might blight the very future that the young would inherit.

"It is, therefore, important that we temper idealism and impatience with pragmatism and a willingness to learn from the mistakes and the successes of the past so as to ensure that the mistakes are avoided and the successes are repeated," he said.

Tracing the nation's growth from the time of independence, he said, the country now had a per capita income that was 10 times higher at almost US\$4,000 (RM15,200), a population of 24 million and full employment, very good electricity and water supply and modern transportation.

"This is where we stand today. We are not without serious problems, problems of national unity, of imbalances between the races, of threats of extremism. But we have also been able to maintain peace and stability, to develop and progress and to contain extremism."

Dr Mahathir said various strategies and policies had been adopted, some of which had worked but all of which had defects.

Pointing out that perhaps the defects were in the policies and strategies themselves or due to human failings, he said: "We definitely have a need to study them closely, to identify their weaknesses and to make adjustments where necessary."

"Perhaps, we should just drop some or all of these approaches to Malaysia's major problems, but before we do so let us not get carried away by the idea of change for the sake of change."

He said change was always disruptive and it was necessary to be careful not to fall into the trap of changing simply because the failures were highlighted.

"Re-engineer by all means, shift the paradigms and entertain brilliant new ideas, but remember today's much criticised ideas and policies were yesterday's perfect ideas and solutions. By the same token, the new ideas of today will be the subject of much criticism for their imperfections in the future."

Dr Mahathir said Vision 2020 would not be a success if only a segment of the community achieved developed status and if only a part of the country progressed, and that to be meaningful all the people in every part of the country must gain.

He said because of this a uniform plan or a single strategy could not be applied and it was necessary to focus on the capacities of the different segments in order to benefit from the plan and the development.

"Still a matter of concern is the seeming inability of the Malays and

the Bumiputera to benefit from the opportunities created for them. They tend to abuse the opportunities and to be too dependent.

"They like to seek the easy way out. And plans and policies for their development are likely to fail. They are likely to fail because they have the wrong set of values, the wrong ethics and culture."

He said all this had to be corrected, not overnight but over a reasonable period of time, and that the Malays and Bumiputera community must be made to realise the need to put in maximum effort.

Dr Mahathir said the recent decision to admit students into government universities based on merit was one such strategy.

"It is not that they don't have the ability. It is just that they do not try, thinking that the Government is always there to look after them."

He said there were 18 years to go to achieve the goals of Vision 2020.

"Can we do it? Can we make up for the delays, and can we insulate ourselves against future uncertainties?" he asked, adding that while the Government was hopeful, there were some disturbing signs.

Dr Mahathir said while early Malaysians overcame their segregation and suspicion of each other to create racial harmony and unity, there was now a resurgence of the old distrust and dislike with people demanding that no effort be made to bring the people of different races, especially the younger people, together.

He said these people wanted children of different races not to go to the same schools and also insisted the schools should not be near each other.

He said they were calling for a Malaysian apartheid.

Dr Mahathir said the New Economic Policy which was designed to redress the imbalances in economic development between the races had achieved minimal success, not from want of effort on the part of the Government but from a tendency to seek the easy way on the part of the Bumiputeras.

"They have become almost totally dependent on the Government. Sino-Malay joint ventures exist but many are still Ali Baba in nature. Bumiputera contractors depend exclusively on government contracts.

"Remove these and they will mostly collapse. Harassed by accusations of cronyism, the Government is tempted to abandon the NEP. But the future generation will have to make this decision."

On the so-called demand for an Islamic state, he said, Malaysia was already an Islamic state because the official religion was Islam and the titular heads were all Muslims and Muslims could practise their religion without hindrance and were assisted by the Government.

"But an Islamic state permits the practice of other religions and so the Malaysian Constitution defends the rights of non-Muslims."

He said all these had been agreed to by the leaders of all races and religions at the time of independence and no one should question the status of race or religion, language or culture of Malaysia.

"But these quarters insist that Malaysia is not an Islamic state and it is their intention to make it an Islamic state according to their interpretation.

"This in itself is a non-starter, for the large number of non-Muslims would ensure through the democratic process that the proponents of this so-called Islamic state would never win and translate their threat into action.

"But precisely because they are not likely to achieve their goal through the democratic process, they have encouraged the achievement of their goal by other means, namely by violence."

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