

PM shows old spunk and wit

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THERE was much of the old spunk and wit from Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the Dewan Rakyat yesterday as he took questions from the Opposition in his final appearance there.

Asked by Dr Tan Seng Giaw (DAP - Kepong) on the government's intolerance towards opposition parties, Dr Mahathir said:

"My answer is very easy. Join Barisan Nasional."

Dr Mahathir said there was tolerance in the coalition whereby the various parties could sit down to discuss the differences among them without being emotional.

He said even though Barisan consisted of various ethnic groups, they could still achieve harmony through co-operation.

"Now there is an imitation (of the coalition) but they are not so successful.

"One side wants hudud, the other side is against hudud," he said, adding that tolerance could not be achieved between the two sides.

"If it is an imitation, the quality

is not so good," he said, eliciting laughter.

To another question by Mohamed Nasir Che Daud (PAS - Kuala Kerai), Dr Mahathir said opposition MPs should be grateful that they were able to come to the Dewan and "say things sometimes irrelevant to the debate."

Calling the opposition MPs ungrateful, Dr Mahathir said a grateful person knows that the prosperity the nation had achieved was due to a reliable Government.

"For example, when we want to build the Penang bridge, the opposition was angry. Now they want another bridge.

"But if we followed the voice of that small majority, people like (Datuk) Malik Mydin will be swimming there every day," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said that he had been following the Dewan proceedings from his office and saw the antics of the MPs.

"I did not come to the Dewan because I am *meluat* (disgusted) to see these kinds of people," he said, causing more laughter in the Dewan.

Earlier, to another question by Datuk Mohamad Aziz (BN - Sri Gading), Dr Mahathir said there should not be any difference among Muslims in Malaysia as they belonged to the same Sunni group and followed the teachings of Imam Shafie.

"If there is a difference in views on how to help bumiputras or in dealing with the non-Muslims, then it is understandable," he said.

Dr Mahathir said it was unfortunate that some quarters misinterpreted the religion in order to gain influence.

"Some say that God is *samseng* just to degrade other people.

"If we say bad things about our country, we will become the victims in the end," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said that Malaysia had its own challenges in practising democracy.

"In our multi-racial and multi-religious country, the controls imposed on racial riots, for example, are actually a protection of democracy and human rights," he said.