

Mahathir concedes NEP abused but...
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Former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad today conceded that the New Economic Policy has been abused by the Malays for quick gains but argued for the continuation of the controversial programme.

Addressing an audience of around 2000 at a symposium on the Malay dilemma, Mahathir said that it is those who had abused the NEP who were partly responsible for the failure to meet the 30 percent bumiputera equity target. I am embarrassed. I often defend the the NEP, but I realise that many of the opportunities awarded through the policy have been abused by the Malays.

"If not, we could have already achieved the 30 percent targets, if not more. We often do things that defeat the government's efforts to bring progress to the Malays," he said.

But despite its flaws, Mahathir (right) is adamant that the NEP should remain as revoking the policy would mean that all Malays losing out, including those who may need help.

"The problem is not the policy but the implementation. (It should be that) if they abuse, they don't get anything anymore," he said when clarifying to reporters later.

Dr M: The fault is ours

In his hard-hitting speech, the elder statesman said that Malay have abused the privileges by selling off permits and licenses awarded to them under the ethnic-based affirmative action policy, and thus have only themselves to blame for their current predicament.

"They receive approved permits (for automobile dealerships) and sell it, they are awarded contracts, they sell it. Quick gains don't last. Whose fault is it? It is ours.

Calling for unity, the former Umno president also urged the exclusively Malay audience to stand up for their rights and not be scared of being called racists for doing so.

"They say Malays come from India, Bugis, Sumatra, Turkey etc, so we are also pendatang (migrants) and some of us are afraid to be accused of racism so we keep quiet.

"(But) we fulfill the definition of a Malay, that is to speak the Malay language, practise Malay customs and Islam...It is the same in other countries ,too, where migrants learn the language, culture and some even change religions to be known as the people of that land," he said.

He added that defending Malay rights does not mean taking away from other races "who had worked hard for what they have", but to take what "rightfully belong to (Malays)...in their original land".

"We had willingly changed the name of our country, the Persekutuan Tanah Melayu (Federated Malay States) to Malaysia, and no one is thankful that we had done so for their interests," he said.

"Our dilemma now is whether to continue this struggle or to accept a Malaysia where Malays have no relevance," he said.

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