

Dr M bemoans Malay rights defenders being called racist
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Former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad is sad whenever he hears calls of 'Hidup Melayu' (Long live the Malays) as this could now be easily construed as racist.

He said such calls used to be louder but not any more as there is fear among the Malays that they could be labelled as racists who reject other races.

"We are not denying them their rights but the Malays feel hurt because their rights are being questioned by others in their own land," he said, touching on a theme which he has repeated time and again.

"It has even come to the stage where others are trying to say that the Malays are immigrants, asking us when we came to this country," he added.

'Yes, I'm of mixed race'

Very rarely does Mahathir admit he is of mixed race, but this event - dubbed by some as the launch of the '1Melayu, 1Bumi movement - is one occasion where he did.

He said many others who claimed they were Malays were "mixed" too, pointing to Kedah Perkasa chief Syed Osman Syed Mansor, who was present on stage with him.

However, he was quick to add that "I am a Malay" since he habitually speaks the Malay language and practises Malay custom and professes Islam as his religion.

"We have been accepted as Malays by the sultans a long time ago... and those who do not speak Malay and who are not Islam are not considered Malays," he explained.

"That is why if anyone says to me that I am not a Malay, I am willing to punch his face," he warned.

Mahathir had every reason to feel defensive as he attended the rather low-key Malay unity gathering in Alor Setar today organised by Malay rights pressure group Perkasa, of which he is patron.

Only a fraction - about 800 - of the expected 30,000 crowd turned up at the Stadium Sultan Abdul Halim, where a trade expo was also simultaneously held for two days.

Although he was greeted by 'bunga manggar' and a silat group, where several youths were seen carrying his memoirs, 'Doctor in the House', as they ushered him on stage, Mahathir himself appeared to be listless, and when he spoke, his voice was soft and low.

Potshots at Anwar

He was entertaining nonetheless as he took the crowd down memory lane, telling them that he would give them "a course on history as the Malays are prone to forget".

He warned that forgetting one's history was detrimental to the race; that it was the very reason why the Malays allowed themselves to be colonised by the British.

During his "lesson", he spoke of how the Malays became split into three political groups, rendering them weak. He urged them to be united, saying that through unity, even the weak could be strong.

At one point during his one-hour 'lesson', his talk turned into an Anwar Ibrahim-bashing session, albeit gently, where he outlined the history of his former protegee's entry into Umno and his ambition to become the country's top leader.

Mahathir's speech touched on sodomy I and II, and the controversial sex video, adding that Anwar appeared to be religious but "behind" he was capable of "something else".

He urged Malaysians to be careful about this man, whom some considered "a hero".

The former premier made jokes with the word "behind", clearly targeting Anwar who is facing allegations of engaging in homosexual activities, drawing laughter from the audience.

Non-Malays told to be considerate

Speaking later on elections, Mahathir said he was saddened by the recent Sarawak polls as it clearly showed that there was lack of support among the non-Malays for BN, especially Umno and other Muslim parties.

He added he hoped history would not repeat itself in the coming elections, recalling that three years ago there were significant protest votes against then-prime minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

"You do not need to burn the entire netting just to get rid of the mosquitoes," he quipped.

He urged Umno to work with other races in the coming general election and asked the non-Malays to be considerate as the Malays did not ask much, just for their share of the economic pie.

"I hope other parties do not go and whisper quietly to others not to vote for the BN," he said.

"We not only want to share power, but share it equally or we would have asked for more as we are 60 percent of the population but we only ask for 30 percent (equity ownership)," he added.