

Dr M: Hang Tuah wasn't an admirable leader
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Aidila Razak

Former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad today dipped his toe in the ongoing debate over Hang Tuah's existence by saying it is wrong to admire the Malay historical leader.

Answering a question from the floor during the Razak Lecture Series, he said Hang Tuah is "too loyal" and was described as having done things that was "not admirable at all".

"Here is a man so servile, so very obedient, so loyal and willing to kill his friend knowing that (Hang Jebat) was condemned to death for something he did not do.

mahathir ebook launching 091211 02 "To kill his fellow Hang is not something admirable at all," Mahathir told an audience of about 300 in Putrajaya.

Hang Tuah is often used as a symbol of servitude and loyalty for Malays, and his story is often invoked in call for support for local leaders.

On the question of the warrior's existence, Mahathir said that "there must be some truth in the story" although not everything can be believed.

He said parts of the Hikayat Hang Tuah, like how Hang Tuah defeated everyone in the world, including Turkey, without even remembering how he got there does not gel with reality.

"Much of this is fiction," he said.

In response, moderator Razali Ismail said that if the British can believe in the legend of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table then Malaysians should be able to believe in Hang Tuah.

The controversy broke when historian Khoo Kay Khim earlier this month disputed Hang Tuah's existence.

Mahathir was speaking on leadership at the second instalment of talks organised by the Razak School of Government.

In his lecture, Malaysia's fourth premier said that as difficult as it may be, society must be careful of the leaders they elect as it is difficult to get rid of leaders once they enter office.

"Even in a democracy, (an elected leader) may have powerful instruments to influence public thinking so the majority select him, when you know the majority was hoodwinked by the incumbent," he said.

Leadership 'musical chairs'

All the same, he said, society should also know to give leaders time to learn the job before ousting them, or it will be a case of leadership "musical chairs".

He said first-term leaders often cannot implement policies before it is time to worry about re-election, especially under the Westminster system where snap polls can be called after three years.

"There is no perfect leader in the world, no matter how good he is, he will do bad things.

"Please excuse the bad things and focus on the good things," said Mahathir, who was PM for over two decades.

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