

There is no problem with extreme ideas, says Dr M
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By Koh Jun Lin

It is okay to hold ideas that are extreme as long as others are not compelled to accept it, particularly through violence, says former Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"If it is only extreme, there is no problem. However, when this extreme idea is followed with action to force others to do what we want, it is unwarranted," he told some 3,000 university students at a dialogue session at Universiti Malaya today.

As much as each person has the right to voice his or her criticism, he said, it was also the other party's prerogative whether to accept it or not.

Mahathir, who is also the patron of Malay rights pressure group Perkasa, had been asked to comment on the issue by a student distraught by the "extreme and emotional" stance of some of his peers in fighting for their causes, to the extent of perceiving everything the government does as wrong.

The dialogue session today was a joint effort between the university and pro-establishment student body Aspirasi, as part of the latter's 'Peaceful Campus' campaign.

Some 3,000 students from various universities attended the program today in addition to audiences watching a live telecast in 11 other public universities.

Earlier, the former prime minister was also asked what would be the best way for students to voice their criticism.

One flag for Malaysia and her people

Mahathir responded by reminding students that while their criticisms might be rejected in favour of the opinions of others, they should not be silenced simply because their ideas were rejected.

"We can repeat our critique or voice other criticisms, because this helps to sharpen our thinking and this is beneficial to a democratic nation, which needs to put the people's opinions first and not merely that of the rulers," he said.

However, he also urged students not to take part in political activities until they have graduated, because tax money was being pumped into their education in the hope that it would be spent well.

Asked about the Sang Saka Malaya flag and purported attempts to make it the national flag, Mahathir said politics should be set aside to support the Jalur Gemilang as the national symbol.

He said if every person has a different idea as to what the national flag should look like, there would be too many flags, but not one to represent all of Malaysia and its people.

“Although it is just a coloured piece of cloth, it has certain meanings and we use it as a symbol that we come from a certain country,” he said.

Individuals who displayed the flag during Merdeka Eve celebrations at Dataran Merdeka have denied charges they want to change the national flag, but said they only wanted to fly it alongside Jalur Gemilang in honour of Malay leftists’ struggles for independence.

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