

Johor nationalism unhealthy for Malaysia, says Mahathir
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Koh Jun Lin

The promotion of Johor nationalism is unhealthy for Malaysia and can lead to the collapse of the federation, former Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohammad said today.

While it is within the right of the Johor royalty to promote the idea, Mahathir said, it was only with unity that Malaysia could prosper.

“Well, it is their right to promote the idea. But to me, if each state tries to be separate, then the federation will collapse. We need to work together because only with unity can we prosper.

“In fact, when we were separated before, we couldn't prosper. We have prospered after independence because we are united in the form of the federation and we support one another,” he told reporters when met in Putrajaya today.

Earlier this morning, Mahathir delivered a keynote speech at a forum themed ‘The federal and the states: Federal-state relations in Malaysia’.

During the forum’s question-and-answer session, Mahathir was asked by a member of the audience to comment on Johor nationalist sentiments and people identifying them as ‘Bangsa Johor’.

Mahathir said the idea of “all citizens regardless of their state of origin are Malaysians” should be promoted instead.

“This trend towards stressing state citizenship is not a very healthy thing. I wouldn't like to go beyond that.

“We are all the same; nobody is superior to the other. We are all Malaysians,” he said.

Mahathir added that Johor’s prosperity is also partly because of the federal government’s doing, such as through projects like the oil refinery in Pengerang, and Iskandar Johor.

In addition, he said the federal government had developed the ports in Tanjung Pelepas and Pasir Gudang in Johor to attract shipping away from Singapore ports.

This explains why the federal government does not want to develop Port Klang, he said, while federal ministers fly around the world to persuade shipping lines to make use of Johor ports.

Compensate Kedah government

Meanwhile, another member of the audience asked Mahathir to comment on the calls several years ago for Penang to be returned to Kedah.

“I don’t think Kedah should try to take back Penang. It may not be able to swallow it,” he quipped in response.

Instead, he pointed to the agreement over 200 years old between the British Empire and the Kedah Sultanate, in which the British would pay 10,000 Spanish silver dollars annually in exchange for control of the Penang Island and Province Wellesley (Seberang Prai).

Today, the federal government pays RM10,000 a year to the Kedah government, in continuing the same agreement.

Mahathir said this is unfair, especially given how prosperous Penang has become. He pointed out that the salaries of most civil servants are even higher than that.

He said the federal government should compensate the Kedah government the equivalent of 10,000 Spanish dollars instead.

“This is I think unfair, because Penang is a rich state and actually it should pay more. It should in fact pay the same value as 10,000 Spanish coins.

“When I was about to step down, I did tell the Kedah government to make a request that the federal government pay in silver dollars or equivalent to the Kedah state government, which today would come to about several million dollars a year.

“But Kedah is very generous. They have decided not to ask, and the federal government is even more generous not wanting to pay,” he said.

The weight and purity of the Spanish dollar had varied, but 10,000 Spanish dollars amounts to roughly 256 kilograms of fine silver. This is currently valued at about RM627,000.

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