

**Dr M says it again: Malays must ditch crutches**  
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The New Economic Policy (NEP) was intended to be a "temporary crutch" and abolished when the Malays and bumiputeras are capable of standing on their own two feet, said former Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohammad.

He said the whole point of the NEP and similar programmes would be lost if the Malay and bumiputera communities continue to rely on it for financial support, a "weakness" which he said is inherent in their culture.

NONEHe said this in his speech during the Mara 44th Anniversary Convention at Medan Mara in Kuala Lumpur today.

Taking Malay reserve land as an example, Mahathir (left) said the then British colonialists and Malay leaders decided to gazette such land to stop the constant sale of land by Malays looking to gain some quick money.

"The trend then was that Malays would sell their land in urban areas because of the high price and move out to the outskirts. When the city expanded, again they sell the land and move further out.

"By logic, if that had continued the Malays would have ended up living in the jungle," he said in his address.

Mahathir stressed that it is up to the Malays and bumiputeras to make full use of the opportunities given to them instead of accusing other races of controlling the economy.

"It is shameful not to fully utilise the opportunities given to you but at the same time demand that these opportunities are not given to anyone else," he said to a packed hall.

This is a far cry from his past defence of the controversial policy, having once said that not enough is being done to improve the lot of the Malays and bumiputeras.

In a later press conference, Dr Mahathir said that it is difficult to set a deadline for the abolishment of the affirmative action practices that were implemented under the NEP but noted that a clear indication would be when the Malays and bumiputeras are financially independent.

Apco a waste of money

On a separate issue, Mahathir said he did not see any reason for the government to pay nearly RM77 million to Apco Worldwide, which was engaged to mend ties between Malaysia and the United States.

He said regardless of the perceived ties between the two countries, there has not been any outward show by the United States that they were unhappy with Malaysia.

Earlier, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Nazri Aziz dumped much of the blame on Dr Mahathir's shoulders for deteriorating ties with the United States over his 22 year tenure, while the rest of the blame went to his successor Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's six

years in power.

To this, Mahathir merely said; "I don't care".

He said the fact is that foreign direct investment from the United States has continued to come to Malaysia, along with a USD1 million handout from the world superpower to "train" Malaysia's armed forces.

"If they want it back, we can give it back. We have one million dollars," Mahathir said.

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