

# Work the brain, not the fingers

BY KAREN CHAPMAN

**W**HY are Malay students not doing as well as the others? Perhaps because their fingers are more efficient than their brains.

This was the comment made by former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad in reference to their preoccupation with *Akademi Fantasia 3* and their voting via SMSes.

"Some students are so taken with *Akademi Fantasia 3* that only their fingers move (sending SMSes) but not their brains - *Jari bergerak tetapi otak tidak bergerak*," said Dr Mahathir when he was asked why some Malay students lagged behind other races in their academic achievements.

He was fielding questions from students at Sekolah Alam Shah in Putrajaya, where he launched the school's Patriotic Month celebrations on Wednesday.

He added that when students were so taken up with a programme that they concentrated on sending SMSes instead of studying, the only people who benefited in the end were the telecommunications companies.

Dr Mahathir said that he did not know whether there should be *Akademi Fantasia 4*.

For the past 10 weeks, a reported 1.6 million viewers had been following *Akademi Fantasia 3* whose outcome was to be decided

through SMS by viewers.

The popular Mawi or Asmawi Ani beat three others to win the contest a week ago.

Dr Mahathir then went on to explain that it was not the government's system or policies which had prevented Malay students from doing well academically.

"Some students just do not take their work seriously. They do not do their homework and waste time loitering at shopping centres.

"Academic success depends on your willingness to work hard," he said.

"Malay students have the same abilities as other races but some just do not work hard."

To another question on why youths were no longer patriotic, Dr Mahathir said it was because many youths today took things for granted.

"During the colonial era, we wanted to become independent and were willing to overcome many obstacles to win independence. Due to our determination and spirit of unity, we were able to do so," he said.

Education Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein pointed out that Patriotic Month and National Day celebrations should not only be confined to certain times or conveyed merely through symbols and slogans.

"We should always love and understand our country and constantly try to boost our loyalty to the country. We should not just



Dr Mahathir (in mask) helping to complete the country's largest jigsaw puzzle.

show this love for the country during celebrations; instead, we should always have this spirit within us.

"Today, Malaysia's struggle is to ensure the country's continued independence.

"We must make certain we are not re-colonised in any way. We have a new vision - to become a *Bangsa Malaysia* that is successful," he said.

Later, Dr Mahathir and Hishammuddin donned masks as they sat on a stage to witness students assembling the country's largest jigsaw in conjunction with the country's National Day celebrations.

It was obvious that the students of Sekolah Alam Shah had practised hard for the two events - the launch of the school's Patriotic Month celebrations and working on the country's largest jigsaw puzzle.

The haze did nothing to dampen the enthusiasm of the students.

Everything went smoothly as the 68 Form Four students attached 408 pieces to assemble a jigsaw puzzle the size of two volleyball courts.

The jigsaw puzzle, depicting Tunku Abdul Rahman proclaiming *Merdeka* with the Jalur Gemilang in the background, was assembled before Dr Mahathir, Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, Hishammuddin, his wife Datin Seri Tengku Marsilla Tengku Abdullah and other ministry officials.

The school's parent-teacher association and alumni had donated some RM10,000 for the jigsaw puzzle project.

The students had spent a month creating the puzzle which would later be put up on the school wall.

Hishammuddin said the students' success in getting their project entered into the *Malaysia Book of Records* spoke volumes about their ability and perseverance.

"Although some people may think this is only a jigsaw puzzle, we must realise that it could not have become a reality without the students' creativity, capability and discipline.

"What is even more important is that these students, in their attempt to create a new record, remembered to link their attempt with their love for their country. They also recognised the country's fight for independence," he said.

Malaysia Book of Records managing director Datuk Danny Ooi made the announcement that the jigsaw puzzle created by the school was the largest in the country.

In fact, Sekolah Alam Shah might well be the first school to have the most listings in the *Malaysia Book of Records*.

The students created the biggest school badge (in 2000), lighted the most candles (11,000) to form the words "Selamat Hari Guru" (in 2001) and built a revolving national crest (in 2002).