

Dr M: Malay roots in Southeast Asia

NOT-15/5/2006

KOTA KINABALU: The word "Malay" applies to all those who trace their roots to the Southeast Asian region, former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

Malays originated from Sumatra and those in Malaysia, including in the peninsula, did not have exclusive rights to the term "Malay", he said.

He said this at a *Colloquium on Internationalisation of the Malay Root* held by Umno Youth at Universiti Malaysia Sabah on Saturday night.

"In Sabah, I never felt the people here were not Malays," Dr Mahathir said.

"Most times, I only distinguish them as Malays or Malaysians," he said.

He pointed out that in the Philippines, the Filipinos regarded independence fighter Jose Rizal as a Malay hero.

Dr Mahathir said in his keynote address that Malaysians needed to be successful within the country before they would be able to command respect and trust internationally.

"To attract people into our

country, we need to prove that we can develop the nation, attain noble virtues and acquire the right skills and knowledge," Dr Mahathir said.

"At the same time, we need to be diligent and willing to work hard, do things over and over again if need be, to ensure we succeed."

Having the right leadership was, therefore, important to ensure the country's visions were achieved, he said.

"But we practise democracy and sometimes we choose based on their pretty faces, because they are friendly or religious, and this will undoubtedly result in some weaknesses."

On his opposition to the Government's decision to scrap the plan to build a bridge to replace the Johor Causeway, Dr Mahathir said he saw it more as an issue of sovereignty.

"I said I would not interfere with the Government once I stepped down and I don't think I am," he said.

"It's just that I cannot afford to give up the country's sovereignty."