

Special rights only a 'safety net': Ku Li

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KUALA LUMPUR: The Malays must realise the protection and special privileges accorded to them by the government to develop them economically, particularly through implementation of the New Economic Policy (NEP), are only a temporary "safety net", a former finance minister said.

Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah said the government provided the safety net so that the Malays would not fall flat in going through the tests and pressures of life.

At the same time, they must learn fast so that they need not depend forever on privileged assistance.

"To achieve progress, they cannot rely on the safety net forever. They must move forward on their own accord and to scale greater heights," he said at the 2007 Za'ba Lecture series here yesterday.

In his speech, titled *Malay Economic Development and Unity*, Tengku Razaleigh said global challenges and pressures arising through various free trade agreements like the Asean Free Trade Agreement (Afta) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) demanded the government to expedite the process so that the Malays would not continue to rely on incentives and privileges handed out by the government.

The NEP, one of the government's time-tested programmes to eradicate poverty and to uplift Malays' integrity and dignity in a short span of time, also seemed to have spared the country from racial turbulents during the 1997 financial crisis as was experienced by Indonesia, said the veteran politician.

"Although the policy failed to achieve its objectives fully, it has given a new

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image to the country, that is, confidence to the people that although we are multiracial, racial jealousy does not stem from economic interpretation," said

Tengku Razaleigh, who is also the Gua Musang MP.

The people's unity and harmony have earned respect and honour for Malaysia overseas as a model peaceful and harmonious multiracial nation, particularly at this crucial time when the causes of world conflicts are no longer due to ideological differences but owing to ethnic, cultural and civilization clashes, he said.

Hence, the good fortune enjoyed by Malaysia, as perceived by certain quarters, was not coincidental but the fruit of an arduous and bitter struggle, he said.

Tengku Razaleigh told reporters later the Malays must quickly acquire the knowledge and skills demanded by the nation so that they need not have to depend on outsiders.

"Actually, the assistance provided by the government was not much... what is being given is the opportunity. The problem is, people abuse the opportunities offered, this misuse is delaying the process of producing learned and knowledgeable Malays," he said.

"The faster they acquire the knowledge and skills, the quicker the special privileges being extended now can be withdrawn.

"However, this also will take time because you can't go to school today and you enter university tomorrow."

The annual Za'ba Lecture is organised by the Malay Studies Academy of Universiti Malaya. - Bernama