

Was Dr Mahathir A Politician Or A Doctor First?

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By Jamaluddin Muhammad

BANGKOK, July 19 (Bernama) -- Was former Malaysian Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad a politician or a medical doctor first?

Contrary to common belief that he joined politics after practising medicine, Dr Mahathir said he was first a politician and then obtained his medical degree to gain credential in pursuing his political career.

Dr Mahathir, who served for 22 years from 1981 as the fourth prime minister of Malaysia until he stepped down in 2003, mentioned this when he was being interviewed during "A Power Dialogue" here last night.

He was interviewed by Abdul Halim Ismail, who is also the Asean secretary-general widely known as Dr Surin Pitsuwan.

Dr Surin, a Muslim who hails from Nakhon Si Thammarat in the middle south of Thailand and was attired in a dark suit and a white skull cap in a rare public appearance, posed the question during a dialogue between them at a gala dinner in celebration of the 72nd anniversary of "Pondok Bantan" (the local Islamic religious school).

Dr Surin, a former Thai foreign minister, became the Asean chief in 2008. His term will expire by the end of this year.

Proud to declare himself "a Pondok student," Dr Surin holds a Master's degree and a PhD in Political Science and Middle Eastern Studies from Harvard University.

Asked where would Malaysia be now without the Vision 2020 he introduced to make the country a developed nation, Dr Mahathir said the country would still progress but probably without any focus as the vision determined its direction and plans.

Touching on the formation of the Asean Community by 2015, Dr Mahathir said the regional group must avoid the mistakes made by the European Union.

"The European Union is in trouble today because it can't work for the benefit of all members as it focuses on the rich members only. Asean must make sure the poor countries would benefit from the community too," he said.

Asean, he said, must avoid the mistake of introducing a common currency which, he added, benefits the rich countries only but makes the cost of living in the poor countries to rise dramatically.

As for globalisation, he said, Asean must look into the interest of the poor countries too as they would not benefit from a freer market.

"The globalisation comes from rich countries and we must not adopt it 100 per cent. We must examine ourselves. We don't want the rich to become richer and the poor, poorer."

Answering a question from the floor, Dr Mahathir said Asean needs to ask fellow member Myanmar to stop what he said was oppression against the Rohingya ethnic minority.

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