

Dr M: Non-Malays too have special rights
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By Syed Jaymal Zahiid

KUALA LUMPUR, March 14 – Tun Dr Mahathir argued today that non-Malay complaints of discrimination stemming from policies favouring the Malays are without “basis” as the country’s minorities too enjoy special rights including the freedom to speak their native languages and practice their own religion.

“Each race enjoys special rights in their own way,” the longest-serving former prime minister (picture) told a forum at University Malaya here, when asked to comment on the opposition’s push for “Malaysian Malaysia” carried by the DAP’s predecessor, the People’s Action Party (PAP), in 1964.

Dr Mahathir said while the country’s ethnic majority do enjoy a special position under the Constitution, the same law guarantees the minorities the right to self-identity through the freedom to practice their respective religion, language and mother-tongue education.

He added that only in Malaysia, the minorities identify themselves according to their root “nationality” like “Chinese Malaysian” and “Indian Malaysian”, a phenomena that reflects the freedom and rights enjoyed by the non-Malays.

“This idea is not practised anywhere else. In Indonesia the Chinese don’t call themselves Indonesian Chinese, they call themselves Indonesians and speak Indonesian.

“Here, we agreed to maintain their rights,” Dr Mahathir said.

Dr Mahathir had and continues to be the leading proponent of Malay rights, in the face of growing calls for a revision of Putrajaya’s race-based affirmative action policies which have been blamed for much of Malaysia’s present economic woes.

Critics have also attributed the country’s corruption problems on the policies which they said nurtured the entrenched culture of political patronage among Umno supporters.

The federal opposition pact Pakatan Rakyat (PR) argued that such policies and the Malay-rights debate are used to enrich only a selected few Malays. Its pledge to dismantle race-based policies and put in place an economic model based on merits have won the support of the non-Malays.

But while PR leaders maintained that this does not mean the abolition of Malay rights, Dr Mahathir alleged voting the opposition would erode the positions of the Malays who would end up being “slaves in their own country”.

The former prime minister argued today that it would not be possible to abolish Malay privileges without doing away with the rights of the minorities.

“If you want to abolish the rights of one race then you have to also do away with the rights of others. Of course none of the races would want this,” he said.

Dr Mahathir had also suggested that the growing opposition to Malay rights reflected a deepening racial strife. He argued that this showed Malaysians are now more racially-conscious.

This has led to stronger racial identification including the birth of more vernacular schools and poorer integration among Malaysia's different races.

"In other countries there is assimilation but here we are happy with integration. There is even little integration now. The different races are not coming together," he said.

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