

Dr M says 'Malay culture' reason for lack of progress

MalaysiaKini.com

13 January 2018

When Dr Mahathir Mohamad was formally announced as Pakatan Harapan's prime minister candidate, it was with the understanding that it was meant to shore up Malay support for the opposition, especially among the rural Malays.

Mahathir, who was prime minister for 22 years until he resigned in 2003, was once known as a Malay rights champion and he continues to enjoy popularity among the demographic.

But the Bersatu chairperson is also known for his sharp criticism of the Malays.

At a talk in Cyberjaya today, he claimed one of the reasons why Malaysia will not become a developed country by 2020 is due to the problem with Malay culture.

"I believe that the Malays' capabilities are the same as the Europeans and the Japanese, but the problem is the culture.

"We find that we are not so committed, not so hardworking and sometimes we are not so trustworthy.

"We always try to find the easy way out, that is why we are left behind. We like it when there is less work, but high pay.

"It is not because we cannot but because we do not want to, that is the problem," he said at a forum discussing his brainchild Vision 2020.

He recounted that when he was the education minister, his staff used to leave work at 3pm.

"I asked my chief secretary, why are they leaving at 3pm. To avoid traffic (the chief secretary said).

"But we are paying them to work until 4.30pm," he said.

This is not the way to become a developed nation, Mahathir said, as we must deliver the best quality in whatever endeavour.

The nonagenarian also lamented that there are too many public holidays in Malaysia, and people are not working hard enough.

This has caused the country to run on autopilot, he said, adding that he personally does not agree with not working on Saturdays.

Malaysia is still not as developed as other countries, he said, so we need to work harder.

“If we run slower than the person in front of us, can we catch up? Of course not. We need to run faster than them.

“(How can) you expect to succeed when you are not working? Impossible, it is impossible to succeed,” he said.

Mahathir, who formulated the Look East policy during his premiership, also praised the Japanese culture for their rapid transformation after World War Two.

The Japanese were so poor after the war that they were being paid with “fistfuls of rice and soy sauce”, he said, but they worked hard to fix their country.

“Because they were hardworking and committed, they succeeded in fixing Japan. Now they are rich.

“What makes them successful is not because they are better or smarter than us, but because their culture has enabled them to achieve higher standards,” he said.

The Japanese, he said, have a strong sense of shame if they were to fail in their work, which drives them to do their best in everything.

“But among the Malays now, sorry, there is less sense of shame... Even if they do bad work, it is okay,” he said.

He also lamented that this cultural failing is due to busy parents who do not spend enough time educating their children as well as a flawed education system.

“If Harapan wins (in the next general election), I will hold the education minister by the neck and tell them to insert into the curriculum cultural lessons which can lead to success,” he said, to applause from the crowd.

Meanwhile Mahathir said his brainchild Vision 2020 will not come to fruition because the government has misinterpreted the meaning of a developed nation.

The current administration seems to think that just because a country achieves a certain amount of per capita income, it will become a developed nation, he said.

“A developed country is a country that is advanced in all fields, including in knowledge, research development, industrial capacity and our ability as a country to influence the world.

"Just because we achieve a per capita income doesn't mean we are developed.

“Because they do not even know the meaning of developed country, it is difficult for the government to reach (Vision 2020).

“Maybe if we give it more time, not till 2050, maybe earlier, but if the interpretation is right and we work towards it, I think we can still reach the status of a developed country, just not by 2020,” he said.

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