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KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 2 — Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah has urged the country to shed “crude nationalism” and come to terms with the reality that many Malaysians are losing faith in their future despite the evidence of material progress.

The veteran Umno man told the British Graduates Association at a dinner here last night that it was a fact that those Malaysians who “can stay away and settle overseas do so with the encouragement of their parents”.

“Their parents tell them to remain where they are, there is nothing for them here. The illusion of nostalgia does not explain why parents fight to send their children to private and international schools rather than the national schools they themselves went to.

“The very same politicians who recite nationalist slogans about our national schools and turn the curriculum into an ideological hammer send their own children to international schools here or in Australia and Britain.

“They know better than anyone else the shape our schools are in. It is no illusion that people do not have the faith in our judiciary and police that they once had,” said Tengku Razaleigh.

The former Finance Minister pointed out that the country inherited at independence a functional country with independent institutions.

These included “the Westminster model of parliamentary democracy, civil law grounded in a Constitution, a capable and independent civil service, including an excellent teaching service, armed forces and police, good schools, sophisticated trade practices and markets, financial markets”.

While he pointed out that the challenges of nation building were serious, but the country “faced them with an independent judiciary, a professional civil service and a well-defined set of relationships between a federal government and our individually sovereign states.”

Indeed we were able to face these challenges because these institutions functioned well.

“Institutionally, we had a good start as a nation. Why is it important to recall this?”

“For one it makes sense of the feeling among many Malaysians and international friends who have observed Malaysia over a longer period that Malaysia has seen better days. There is a feeling of wasted promise, of having lost our way, or declined beyond the point of no return.”

He said that such a feeling was too pervasive to be put down to the nostalgia of always finding the good old days best.

Malaysians, Tengku Razaleigh contends, are losing faith in their future despite the evidence of material progress.

“We have lots of infrastructure. Lots of malls and highways. Especially toll highways. It is not for want of physical infrastructure, dubious as some of it is, that we feel we languish. It is a sense that we are losing the institutional infrastructure of civilised society.”

He said that if Malaysians felt a sense of loss, or tell their children not to come home from overseas, or are making plans to emigrate, it was not because they did not love the country, or were ungrateful for tarred roads and bridges.

“It is because they feel the erosion of the institutional infrastructure of our society. Institutional intangibles such as the rule of law, accountability and transparency are the basis of a people’s confidence in their society.”

He said it was time to shed the “crude nationalism” which refuses to acknowledge things “not invented here”.

He pointed out that Malaysia had a good start because it had inherited from the British a system of laws, rights and conventions that had been refined over several hundred years.

Malaysia, he said, also inherited the English language, and with that a strong set of links to the English-speaking world.

“There should be a rethinking of our attitude to the English language. By now it is also a Malaysian language. It would be sheer hypocrisy to deny its value and centrality to us as Malaysians.

“Do we continue to deny in political rhetoric what we practice in reality, or do we grasp the situation and come up with better policies for the teaching and adoption of the language?”

He urged Malaysians to reconnect with Britain as it is today instead of recycling stale colonial era stereotypes.