

The 36th Umno assembly

59 OCT 1985

THE Umno General Assembly is an important event not only to the Malays but also to the country.

With a membership of more than a million, Umno is not only the largest political party in this country but is also one with most of the clout.

As such, the Umno General Assembly is of absorbing interest not only to the Malays but also to other Malaysians as well.

The 36th General Assembly is special in the sense that it was held under Umno's own roof.

In the past the General Assembly has been held in a hotel and with each passing year it became more and more difficult to find a hall big enough to accommodate the ever increasing numbers of the delegates.

This year the General Assembly was held in the Dewan Merdeka of the new Umno Complex, in Jalan Tun Dr Ismail, Kuala Lumpur.

The party has come a long way since the days when most of the delegates had to put up in small hotels along the old Princess Road, now known as Jalan Raja Muda.

Today's delegates do not have to put up with such austerity, even poverty. Today the delegates are housed in posh hotels, even five-star hotels, and in the near future they will be housed in the new hotel that is now being built next to the new Umno Complex.

The official opening of the Umno Complex took place on Sept. 26. Here I wish to congratulate Umno for honouring the efforts of the past leaders who have served Umno so well in days gone by.

The homage paid to its first president, the late Datuk Onn Jaafar, must have warmed the cockles of the heart of his son, Tun Hussein Onn, and his widow, Datin Halimah Mohamed, as well.

Tributes were also paid to the Tunku, the late Tun Abdul Razak, the late Tun Dr Ismail and to Tun Hussein.

I am particularly glad that the Opposition was also invited to the opening ceremony. It is little acts of graciousness like these that will forge national unity in

opening ceremony but unfortunately due to my infirmity, I was unable to accept the invitation. But I saw the ceremony on TV.

I liked the major speeches made that afternoon. Encik Daim Zainuddin made his debut at the General Assembly as the treasurer of the party. He won the hearts of the audience by his friendly and amusing speech.

But the *piece de resistance* of the opening ceremony was in the speech by the Umno president, who fired the opening shot of the coming general election.

Amidst the pomp and pageantry that pervaded that opening ceremony, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad reminded the delegates and the audience both inside and outside the Dewan Merdeka that Umno will always safeguard the interests of the Malays but the co-operation of the non-Malays too is essential.

He called on Umno members to place the interests of the party above personal gain and reminded them of the hard work and sacrifice put in by stalwarts of the past.

He traced the trials and tribulations of the early days of the party, especially at the time when the Tunku took over as president.

The party headquarters at the time was located in a small shophouse in Johore Baru. It was not till 1955 that the headquarters was shifted to the new building in Batu Road.

He reminded his audience that the building was completed with the aid of Chinese towkays.

For more than a quarter of a century that building served as the headquarters of the party which in the meantime has increased its membership to more than a million. That is an achievement that any party must be proud of.

The party has now moved into new premises but the building does not belong to the party. It is owned "by the banks." The new complex costs \$368 million and the party had to dispose of some of its assets and borrow \$265 million from the banks to help finance the con-

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Without Fear or Favour



By TAN SRI DR TAN CHEE KHOON

nations to wipe out the mortgage to the banks.

What was left unsaid was the cost of the hotel next door which may well be double that of the whole complex.

In the euphoria, no delegate questioned the cost involved and the price that Umno has to pay for the opulence that the delegates enjoy.

The rent of the Dewan Merdeka is \$12,000 a day. As it is not used most of the time it is a very expensive luxury.

The more than \$2 million that was collected in the Derma Kilat is not enough to pay for the bank loan servicing for a month. I gather that loan servicing costs \$3 million a month, \$36 million a year. This is a very sobering thought that must engage the attention of the treasurer.

Amongst those present at the colourful and glittering ceremony at the Dewan Merdeka were the Tunku, Tun Hussein Onn and the widows of the late Tun Razak and Datuk Onn Jaafar, the founder of Umno.

To lend colour to the occasion, Dr Faridas Abdullah recited a poem in remembrance of the services of past Umno leaders. I am sure that all these tributes to the services of past Umno leaders must have touched the hearts of delegates in the Dewan Merdeka and also the thousands outside the hall who followed the ceremony on TV and radio.

The new Umno Complex has certain

sections of it named after the leaders of the past. Thus, there is the 42-floor Menara Datuk Onn, and the convention and exhibition centre have been named Putra World Centre after Tunku Abdul Rahman, our first Prime Minister.

The exhibition hall of the Putra World Trade Centre has been named Dewan Tun Abdul Razak and the other two conference halls have been called Dewan Tun Ismail and Dewan Tun Hussein.

The *doa selamat* was read by Datuk Anwar Haji Wan Mokhtar Ahmad after which the hall was darkened and the audience waited for the dedication ceremony.

This was to be no ordinary dedication with a plaque being unveiled by the president. From the left of the stage a model of the Umno Complex emerged and two boys in Malay *baju* were lowered from above.

They walked up to Dr Mahathir and led him by the hand to the model of the complex and the lights came on again. The poem by Dr Faridas was read and the Umno song sung.

Dr Mahathir presented framed photographs to the Tunku, Tun Hussein Onn, Tun Hajjah Rahah and Datin Halimah Mohamed. In turn Dr Mahathir was presented with a photograph by Encik Daim. And so the historic ceremony came to a close with the assembly adjourning for tea.