

Moderate policy will ensure Umno leads, says Mahathir

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri — The nation will continue to accept Umno's leadership for as long as the party maintains its traditional philosophy and its moderate ways, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

This philosophy had caused the Government to adopt an open and pragmatic attitude, allowing it to bring happiness and well-being to the people and the country.

It was suitable for Malaysia's multi-racial society while at the same time ensuring the protection of the Bumiputeras, who "greatly need protection and assistance".

"For as long as Umno remains strong and stable, its ability to overcome problems can never be in dispute," he said at the opening of the 38th Umno general assembly.

The Umno president said the party philosophy had guided the Government and restrained it from using its powers indiscriminately.

Far from being weak, the Government would not hesitate to respond if there were people who tried to take advantage of the Government's open and pragmatic attitude.

"If such freedom is often abused, the liberal attitude of the Government will have to cease."

On the economy the Prime Minister said the Government had improved the country's financial position and ability to cope with the recession.

It no longer borrowed without regard for its repayment burden and had scaled down expenditure through the privatisation of certain agencies.

The trimming of the civil ser-

vice and privatisation were beginning to show results. The national reserves had doubled compared with the situation three years ago.

He said: "Our economy will also grow rapidly if we do not have to monitor such growth to ensure that the income differences between the communities does not become more apparent, or in other words, if we are prepared to drop the New Economic Policy.

"But the NEP is our choice. We do not want to be proud of achieving a high economic growth at the expense of the Bumiputeras.

"Government policies are still based on the fair and equitable distribution of wealth although in the process our growth is somewhat affected.

Speaking out

"Let us be a bit slow as long as we are safe."

Dr Mahathir said while Malaysia jealously guarded its sovereignty, it also maintained good relations with other countries "but this must be based on reciprocity".

It would not bow to any person or country out of fear or because of money.

While acknowledging that Malaysia was small and "could not shake the world", Dr Mahathir said it did not mean that it should keep quiet in the face of wicked deeds by big powers.

He spoke out against the rich countries, saying that last year they gained about US\$70 billion (about \$182 billion) following the drastic fall in the prices of raw materials.

The success of the rich nations in depressing the prices of raw materials meant that they had

succeeded in increasing their wealth at the expense of the poor countries.

In his 45-minute speech, he spoke of subjects ranging from international politics to Press freedom and from the national economy to Umno's traditional philosophy.

He, however, dwelt at length on Umno and the problems facing it.

He pledged that the Government would not give up efforts to wipe out deviations at the management level in all fields.

This was in line with efforts to inject Islamic values, he said.

Action had been taken against those who misappropriated money belonging to others and that had been entrusted to them, but "unfortunately, we have not obtained adequate proof of deviations of such (other) directors, managers and businessmen", he added.

Dr Mahathir said the Government would strive to ensure that those involved would be punished accordingly.

He said in its efforts to inject Islamic values in the country, the Government would emphasise values like comradeship, discipline, sincerity and the pursuit of wealth in a "halal" (legitimate) manner.

Dr Mahathir said the Government would not allow groups affected by the recession to become the target of bank actions.

The Government had advised financial institutions not to be too harsh in their efforts to demand payments or in taking legal action, he added.

He said the Government did not want businesses and entrepreneurs, particularly Bumiputeras, to be in a disadvantageous position when the economy recovered.