

Unity key to survival, Malays reminded

Dr M: Struggle is not over yet

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JOHORE BARU, Thurs. — Umno recaptured the moments of its birth 43 years ago today in the grounds of the Istana Besar with a sober reminder of the importance of unity to ensure the survival of the Malays.

Both Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and the Sultan of Johore told the Malays of the supreme importance of unity in safeguarding the country and its future generations.

Dr Mahathir, in an hour-long speech to tens of thousands of party members gathered in and around the area, said the Malay struggle for development, a better standard of living and an equitable share in the economic wealth of the nation had not ended.

"The Malays have not yet achieved a standard of development that will enable them to compete well with the other communities in the country, or with the rest of the world," he said.

Whatever progress the Malays have achieved thus far under the New Economic Policy had been due to the existence of Umno, and its ability to protect and provide for the community.

And Umno, said Dr Mahathir, had been born from a sense of unity among Malays in their fight for their

rights against the British and the Malayan Union.

"It was unity that made the Malays, hitherto so parochial, come together from different States and organisations in 1946 to fight as one when their survival was threatened by the creation of the Malayan Union."

Malays from all walks of life, from the elite to the poorest classes, came together, supported by the Rulers, and formed Umno, which today has created a politically stable and sophisticated society.

Dr Mahathir said the success of the Malay struggle to defeat the Malayan Union and subsequently attain independence had not been based on

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armed revolution, violence or material rewards, but rather on selflessness and complete support of the members for their leaders.

The Prime Minister said these elements continued as Umno tradition, where leadership succession from the time of Datuk Onn Jaffar to Tunku Abdul Rahman, Tun Abdul Razak and then Tun Hussein Onn, had been largely without contest and had gone smoothly.

Even if there had been contests for party posts, these had been conducted without malice, money campaigns or resulting disunity — until 1984.

In that year, Dr Mahathir said, one person had insisted, against all advice, to challenge the then deputy

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president. In 1987, this same person went on to challenge the president of the party — and the consequence of it all was the deregistration of Umno after it was declared an unlawful society by the High Court in 1988.

The actions of this person reflected ambition and self-interest, and had only created disunity among the Malays.

Dr Mahathir said those who really treasured unity and harmony should lend themselves to the party and accept its will and policies, not form a minority or splinter group among themselves to oppose the majority.

The doors of Umno, he said, were still open and those who truly had the spirit of 1946 should return to the fold.

Dr Mahathir said Umno had maintained its credibility because the leaders received the support of its members, but this did not mean they could do as they pleased.

"Party leaders are free to act only insofar as their actions do not deviate from party principles and objectives," he said.

Dr Mahathir reminded the Malays to always remember the history of the struggle of Umno, and what the past could teach.

"If we forget the past, we will continue to repeat its mistakes; but if we remember the contributions of our former leaders, the story and the spirit behind the formation of Umno, its struggles for the Malays, and be thankful for what we have, God willing, we

will become a proud, brave and respected people."

The three-hour colourful ceremony started with the arrival of dignitaries at about 2pm, headed by Johore Menteri Besar Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin.

Dr Mahathir arrived at 2.45pm, and was greeted by the beating of 400 kompangs. He was then accompanied to the main stairway of the Istana Besar by 120 participants clad in the traditional costumes of the different States.

Flanked by Umno deputy president and Deputy Prime Minister Ghafar Baba, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin and other party leaders, Dr Mahathir also witnessed a *silat pahlawan* demonstration by 144 youths.

Throughout, the celebration was interspersed with songs sung by the Puteri Umno choir, comprising students from the Sultan Ibrahim Girls School and Sekolah Tun Fatimah.

Earlier, a heavy downpour threatened to spoil the celebration which was telecast live by RTM. The skies, however, cleared up just before the gathering began and it turned sunny and clear as the ceremony went on.

The highlight of the event was the beating of the giant Beduk Raja by the Sultan of Johore at about 8pm to signify the official formation of Umno on the very same steps of the Istana 43 years ago.

The Sultan then announced that the Beduk Raja would be kept in the dining hall of the Istana Besar, where the first meeting to form Umno took place. /