

# Of election and issues of national importance

By Nuraina Samad

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. — Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, by all counts, has driven the message home that the party must prepare itself for a general election that will be held very soon.

At the Umno general assembly which ended yesterday, Dr Mahathir had indeed set the tone and the stage for an impending one.

The proceedings during the three-day assembly saw delegates who took part in the debate addressing issues directly.

Dr Mahathir, replying to questions from reporters, remarked that he was impressed with the level of maturity the delegates demonstrated.

He said it was good to note that most of them had done research on the subjects they spoke on to create a more substantial debate.

Umno leaders were in agreement with this. Umno permanent chairman Tan Sri Sulaiman Ninam Shah said it was the best assembly while party secretary-general Datuk Mohamad Rahmat said the serious tone of delegates reflected their maturity in discussing important issues.

Indeed the issues raised were important. They were not contentious issues that would do no good to Umno in the face of an election.

In his presidential address, Dr Mahathir, touched on Pas, questioning the party's right to use the word "Islam" in its name. He spoke of social ills and moral decadence and decay.

He also said it was important for leaders not only to be clean but also seen to be clean.

And, in his style, he left many a delegate and journalist wondering when, raising the issue of the alleged affair involving former Malacca Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Rahim Tamby Chik and a 15 year-old-girl, he drew an analogy with the murder of Julius Caesar in the hands of his adopted son, Brutus.

"Who was Brutus?" many had wondered but did not openly ask.

Certainly, it was not an issue that figured prominently in the assembly.

As a Penang Umno delegate said: "This is not a time to dwell on trivial issues. We are taking the cue from the president. We have to deal with serious and more pressing issues. We cannot be frivolous."

One delegate who touched on the Rahim affair in the debate did so quite apologetically.

Said a delegate: "The Rahim issue is a non-issue. It has been bled dry. It has been thoroughly discussed. It serves no purpose to talk about it.

"We can talk about it after the elections," he said, stressing that it had nothing to do with not wanting to wash dirty linen in public.

"We have been doing that in the past ... we have touched on even more sensitive issues. We have criticised the palace ... personalities. It is just that this is not the time," he said.

The issue of Pas was deli-

berated at length. As far as Umno is concerned, Muslims must accept Umno as a party for Muslims and must reject Pas' contention that it is secular.

"They must not even believe that Pas can offer solutions to our social ills," said a delegate.

Pas and winning Kelantan are Umno's greatest challenge and it is important to work out the right attitude among members.

A Kedah delegate said there are some people in the State who are even saying that the *hudud* law should be applied to overcome the *boh-sia* and other ills plaguing society.

"Dr Mahathir has to see that the *hudud* law does not have an attraction for Muslims. He is saying that we are a Muslim party ... only our way is different."

Many delegates felt that Dr Mahathir's message had gone down well as his advice touched on being honest and having noble values.

In his winding-up speech, he explained that he did not direct "Brutus" to be anyone because "Brutus is just ... Brutus is in everyone of us".

Indeed, winning the general election is serious business and Dr Mahathir has set a high goal when he said that the Barisan Nasional is confident of winning a bigger majority this time.

And if the assembly is any indication, those instrumental in helping the party win are undoubtedly mentally and emotionally prepared for a general election.

"Certainly, we will return home ... ready to work hard," said a delegate.