

10/10/1997

Bowled over by PM's wittiness

THE Prime Minister shared his somewhat unorthodox thoughts with the appreciative audience, but startled them when he concluded with:

"You can ignore all that I have said and I wouldn't mind it at all. I will not go down in history as a great thinker. I am more a doer than a thinker.

"Many people say that I often shoot from the hip. Some say I'm a loose cannon. Perhaps they are right. Certainly they take careful aim at me when they say that.

"But if you hold public office you must accept being shot at. I am glad the shooting is hypothetical rather (than) literal. Other leaders are not so lucky."

His words were greeted with roars of laughter.

Other portions of the speech which hit the mark was on his own "qualifications". He said:

"I am not a military man. So I am quite relieved that the organisers have not asked me to speak with regard to strategies on how to win battles on the battlefield.

"I am not a political scientist either. So I am relieved that I am not required to speak to you like an academic.

"I am a trained medical doctor - rather out of touch with my profession now and probably would never be in touch again. Doctors usually have no strategy. Certainly I did not when I was practising.

"I only had a kind of routine which I must say served me well in politics also. Whenever faced with a problem I would begin by taking the history - enquire about the symptoms, i.e. how the problem manifests itself; do a physical examination (like examining latrines and flushing them to see whether they work); do some lab test, make a diagnosis (must make a diagnosis - must not fear being wrong because not diagnosing or deciding is worse than diagnosing or deciding wrongly) than treat or propose a solution to the problem.

"No strategy required."

And his opening remarks set the tone:

"Strategic thinking is a relatively new thing. People have been thinking for a long time, I think. But the results sometime seem to be that they don't think at all - much less strategise their thinking."

(END)