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PM: Don't succumb to extremism of any kind (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Reminding Umno leaders and members repeatedly that the party had done much to put Islam in its rightful place, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad urged them not to succumb to extremism of any kind.

The Prime Minister and Umno president said the party's efforts had also helped Islam to gain a measure of respect from the world, and Umno leaders and members should help to enhance the religion's standing by rejecting extremism, especially in a multi-racial and multi-religious country like Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir said: "We in Umno need to deal with every threat for the sake of the freedom and peace of our country, for the sake of the prosperity and security of Muslims and other Malaysians.

"Believe me ... if we allow extremist groups to do as they please, we will be just like several other Muslim countries which are weak, oppressed by bigger powers, chaotic and have riots all the time.

"Umno's responsibility is heavy. The challenges which we have had to face and overcome in the past are small compared to the challenges ahead. If we are not brave and lack conviction to fight for truth and honour, if we are preoccupied with wealth and materialism, if we are involved in corrupt practices, and if we allow those who use religion to act indiscriminately, then the 51 years of struggle for the religion and the race will go to waste."

Dr Mahathir gave this advice when opening Umno's 51st annual general assembly at the Putra World Trade Centre here.

Speaking on the topic Redeeming the honour of race and religion, he dwelt at length on the subject of Islam - its history, its influence on the culture of its followers, the progress it had brought, the abuse of the religion which had led to open conflicts and what needed to be done to redeem its honour and dignity.

Dr Mahathir said: "It is 40 years since Umno led the Government in ruling a multi-racial and multi-religious country. Throughout the history of independent Malaysia, we have seen how our country, which was once backward and weak, freed itself from the shackles of colonialism and went on to advance to the point that it has now become an example to other developing countries.

"Although the Malaysian population is made up of many races, religions, languages and cultures, the Umno-led Government has been able to ensure peace and reduce racial tendencies.

"The Malays and other Bumiputera who were once weak economically have now integrated well into the trading and industrial sector, so much so that the distinction in terms of efficiency in utilising and acquiring resources of wealth between them and other ethnic groups is no longer glaring.

"Although there were attempts in the beginning to split the Malays along religious lines, they failed. The majority of Malays opted for a moderate attitude as is required by Islam, and not an extremist one which is condemned by the religion.

"Because of this, Malaysia has become rich and strong and is able to help others who are oppressed and victimised, including the Muslims in Bosnia, Palestine, Somalia and elsewhere. We do not experience the problem of riotings by extremist groups as found in many other developing countries, including many Muslim countries."

Expanding on the role of Umno in the nation's progress, the Prime Minister said that whether or not the objective to make Malaysia a developed nation was achieved depended on several factors.

"From outside the country, there are many enemies who would like to colonialise us again indirectly.

"They are helped, consciously or unconsciously, by groups in the country who are inclined towards extremist ways and are not tolerant, including Muslim groups that are not happy because we do not exhibit ways which to them are Islamic - that is to riot, condemn, and to always accuse other Muslims of being unIslamic," Dr Mahathir said.

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