

06/09/1997

Redeeming dignity of religion

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad

THIS is the 40th year Umno is leading the Government which rules independent Malaysia. Our party can be proud for being able to govern the country for so long.

Actually this is not the case with most political parties which struggled for independence and succeeded to form the government. Once the countries gained independence they could not remain as the ruling parties even for one or two decades, especially if the system practised is democracy. The people are easily bored with a political party although it has succeeded and served the people in the struggle for independence.

A political party which rules a country that has just gained independence is different from a party which rules a country that has never been colonised. The government of a country which has just been given independence is not only required to administer, but also to fulfill the independence and develop the country so that it is more progressive than during the time it was colonised.

Even governing and imposing laws, rules and regulations will not be easy for a government which has just taken over. The administrators are usually not experienced, may not be efficient, honest, or can easily be bribed and so on.

If it is not democratic, if it is feudal or run by a single party or a dictator, oppression, cruelty, misuse of power and deviation can easily crop in.

The people may be forced to topple a dictator and destroy everything in the process. But, in a democratic country, an effective government cannot be established if tussle for power and irresponsible action of the people are always happening. Actually there is no political system or government which can guarantee the progress of a country. Many other factors are needed.

Thanks to Allah, we in Malaysia do not have a dictatorial government. We are democratic. We know democracy has certain weaknesses. The people could be bribed with money or wasteful development; the people may choose a senseless leader, one who is greedy, who only wants position, who is corrupt and so on because the voters are influenced with certain propaganda, including racial and religious sentiments.

It is not exactly right to say that the majority of the people are wise and know how to choose a leader. Because of loyalty to certain individuals or influenced by the ideology or parochialism, the majority may make an unwise choice which can be detrimental to the country.

After being elected, the leader may be found to be unsuitable, not keeping his promise, corrupt or the like. Unfortunately in a democracy, bringing down those who have been elected is not easy. There are those who will continue to strongly support these leaders because of self interest, because they have been bribed, because they like to protect the party ideology and for many other reasons.

What is clear is that it is not easy to just form a government and run a country. What more to develop a country. For a democratic or undemocratic country, what is easy is to just let the situation perpetuate while the leader basks in his status and power. Today, it's the turn of this leader, tomorrow the turn of another one to enjoy the position.

Thanks to Allah, Malaysia has succeeded in using the democratic system, elect the Government and enjoy an effective administration. But merely

this will not ensure our progress. To progress, we need good ideas, an approach that can realise the ideas and capable managers. When our country progresses and our programmes materialise, it means these factors are with us.

But we cannot be complacent with the normal progress. In this era, we need strength to prevent from being colonised in a new way. The strength does not mean in the military form, although to a certain extent it is needed. The strength we need is the strength that comes from political stability, economic health, social justice, efficient administration, the acquisition of knowledge and sophisticated technology which is no less than that of developed nations.

The question is are we capable of acquiring this comprehensive strength? We should remember that those who chase must be faster than those being chased. Otherwise we will certainly not get to our target. Our target moves and will not wait for us. Can we, the Malays and Bumiputeras, move fast until we can achieve our objectives?

Simply thinking about the immensity of the challenge that we face can frustrate us from the start. Those who are frustrated normally reject the need to pursue the target and cheat oneself with the claim that it is not true that the targets are better than their situation. This is the sour grape psychology as they cannot enjoy it.

This type of people try to deny their weaknesses by saying that wealth, strength, efficiency and knowledge possessed by others do not bring any good. Those said to be progressive are not really progressive as progress cannot be measured with material achievement. Success, they say, has a different meaning. Actually those said to be left behind are more successful although they may not be seen to be successful. There are those who are frustrated because they had failed, and start to terrorise blindly. Children, when angry and disappointed, destroy what they have with them to vent their anger. Those who fail and do not see how they can overcome their failures also vent their anger in the same manner. They terrorise, kill, bomb and bring down aircraft together with innocent passengers. They vent their anger on the weak, often on their own people and their own country.

By doing so, they will continue to be left behind, humiliated and oppressed. But they do not know other ways than these negative means.

They will not change tactics, will not try to pursue progress, will not turn to more rational means because from the start they believe they are not capable, will not succeed or are not ready to persevere with the long time needed to pursue success. They do not believe in themselves. Therefore, they will continue with their negative ways and remain backward permanently.

This is what we see in a number of countries, especially Muslim countries which face problem of violence by extremist religious groups.

Are we included in these groups? Frustrated, believe that we cannot possibly succeed, cheat ourselves and vent our anger?

There are among us who have this kind of thinking, consciously or otherwise. Therefore, they want us not to try to make ourselves successful. They want us to arrogantly claim we are already better off, more successful and bigger than others no matter what proof is given to deny this claim.

Deep in their hearts, they know their claim is not true. They know they are not the masters, but actually slaves. But because they are not confident that they can become masters, they cheat themselves by making claims repeatedly that they are the masters.

Thanks to Allah, now more people believe we can. And of course we can. We are not yet able to achieve everything we try, but Insya'Allah, we

will. We can do them with repeated attempts; we can do them through perseverance, learning, trying and trying again until we can.

What are we short of? From the physical aspect, from mental and determination, we are no different from races which have advanced. The difference is our culture, our value system and the civilisation that we have built.

Are we going to lose our identity, the identity of our race if we improve our values until we can establish a new culture and civilisation for ourselves? Culture and civilisation which are more suitable for progress, which can redeem and uphold the dignity of our race?

For example, we respect diligence. But we know we are not so diligent. If we do something, we do not go all out until we really succeed, until the outcome of our work achieves very high quality.

We are easily satisfied with the result of our work. Not so good, less durable, not so lasting, not so beautiful and not so clean does not matter. As such the outcome of our work is not so good, not very lasting and is sub-standard in all aspects, that is of lesser quality.

On the contrary, an advanced race is so diligent, so critical of the results of their work, so particular about quality and durability and so on.

For instance, not many things are left behind by our ancestors. In developed countries, old buildings still stand magnificently although built a thousand years ago. Their fortresses are still strong and can be used. The original beauty is still there.

Buildings of our ancestors are not there anymore. They did not build permanent buildings. They did not construct buildings with lasting and strong material. As long as they could be used at that time, it was enough. What was the need for buildings that last? We are not going to use them after we die. It is sufficient for them to be only temporary - one day, one month, one year, 10 years. Why the need for buildings to last 100 years?

In Europe, we find buildings in villages and towns with fortresses of more than 1,000 years old still inhabited and used for trade and defence. In fact, these towns have unique shapes and are so attractive to tourists; and become the source of income to the people until today.

We made boats, for example, crudely. As long as they could be used and not sink, it was enough. Whether they were for the rulers or dignitaries or the country, they should not be anything more than temporary. They were made crudely, with planks nailed without consideration to the length. Some were wide, some not. The floor were placed simply, no roof, no room, not sufficiently equipped and not decorated. The quality of work was not important. As long as they could be used, that's enough.

While in the West as time went by, larger boats were built until they became ships, then made from steel, equipped with rooms and decorated like palaces; our boat did not grow, still made from wood, not equipped with sailing materials and left just like that.

We used rows or sails without taking into consideration the sizes or their efficiency. We did not make sailing an area of study that needed research and be recorded so that others who wished to sail could learn and apply them.

We did not provide comprehensive sailing maps. We simply guessed. We asked those who probably knew or used to it and made rough guides. We used it just once, we did not record it for us to remember later or to become the guides for others. If we remember fine. If not, doesn't matter. Only ask when we get lost.

People say, if a German is asked to write about a mosquito, we will find volumes of thick books which contain everything about the insect; from its

shape, rough or smooth, so indepth to the extent of its habit, its diet, the way it breeds, its home and one thousand and one things about it. For us, probably two or three sentences are enough on this useless insect. What's the point of wasting time on an insect which only knows how to bite.

Because of the kind of views we have that we do not relate mosquito with malaria which killed hundreds of thousands of people. Certainly even if we know that the mosquito bite is dangerous, we assume that all mosquitoes bring malaria and do not care to learn that only the aedes mosquito which has a certain shape and certain habits cause dengue.

And because we do not know, we cannot save ourselves from this fatal disease. If not for other people of different culture undertaking research, we may just accept malaria in our country as natural and even worst, we may even blame God. That God equip us with the brain and then we fail to use it, does not cause us to feel guilty at all.

These examples show how different is our culture with that of an advanced race. We may think that cultural difference is not important. But actually it is these differences which help determine who is advanced and who is not.

The question is are we prepared to accept and practise the culture that can make us progressive. Are we going to become less Malay or less Iban or Kadazan or less Malaysian because we accept certain aspects in a foreign culture? I do not think we will become less Malay, less Iban, less Kadazan or less Malaysian just because we are more interested to learn something indepth, we are more knowledgeable, we are more disciplined and systematic in terms of methods and approach and are more concerned with the knowledge we accumulate which can possibly be used not only by us but also by others and other generations.

We do not become Europeans because we wear coat and tie, speak English, practise democracy and not feudalism.

Compare the open research in the Western culture with the attitude of our bomoh and dukun. If our bomoh and dukun find or invent a potent medicine, they will hide the ingredients from others. They will not write in the journal on the matter. They will not conduct studies sincerely, that is without being influenced by self interest.

Whether potent or not, the claim on the effectiveness of their medicine continues and the recipe hidden. When they die the recipe is lost, the potent medicine is lost. Unfortunate will be for those who fall sick after the bomoh or dukun is not around anymore.

Today knowledge on medicine expands rapidly because advanced races did not hide their knowledge. We can also share this. But can we share the

Isn't it a loss to us when knowledge is hidden just because those who invent the medicine want to keep the benefits that can be reaped from it for themselves? Despite this, we know that there is no dukun who became wealthy because of his knowledge, no generations of dukun or bomoh who are academic, respectable and wealthy.

On the contrary, although the medical experts of advanced races exposed their knowledge, they did not lose because of it. The world respects them and their names are written in gold ink and are always remembered. Many were awarded with Nobel Prize. Certainly they became richer than our bomoh and dukun who have ingredients of potent medicine.

That is the extent of difference between our culture and that of the advanced races. Did they become progressive because of this culture of theirs or that they can practise this culture because they are advanced? Can we say this culture does not influence the progress that they have achieved? Let us ponder together.

There are many more differences in culture and life's values between

those who are less advanced and those who are advanced. We are a half advanced race and certainly some of the things in our culture are different from those who are less advanced than us.

We see how those who are less advanced always struggle for power, practise corruption openly, do not like to live with rules and laws, indisciplined, lazier than us, never make an attempt to absorb better system and approach and many other differences. That is why they are less advanced than we are. And we often say things which are not good about them, why they do not do this and that like what we do.

These less advanced people are probably more advanced than the primitive races who live slightly better off than God's creations which have no capability to think. If we study the difference in the achievements of these races, we will definitely see the link between culture and the performances of the races.

We can be proud of our level of progress thus far. Unfortunately when we begin to easily feel satisfied with the little things we have, the sign is our performance of progress will decline. This is because those who have already advanced are not static. They continue to progress and leave us who do not move behind; as time goes by, they progress further, until we are considered by them as a primitive race.

And that is not all. They will oppress us, will enslave us. Maybe we just accept being humiliated and enslaved. What's wrong? But we like to claim ourselves as the master. We want people to respect us. We want. But people will not give just because we want. They will only give to us if there is something within us which forces them to respect us, forcing us to become their master.

An English proverb says, "There is no need to reinvent the wheel". The wheel has been reinvented, just copy. What is needed is that the wheel needs to be improved so that it become faster. A round tree trunk can be cut to make a wheel, but this wheel will be heavy, easy to break and will not be fast. If a hole is bored in the middle of this thin wood, it becomes lighter, faster but easily breakable. But if the wheel is tied with steel around it, the wheel will become stronger and more durable. And if the wheel is installed with compact rubber tyre or with air tyre, the wheel becomes more efficient. For a culture which gives priority to continued progress, research is made continuously to invent better things.

Although we do not need to invent wheels, we should upgrade the sophistication of the wheels we use. Similarly if we want to progress, the ways and culture to progress are already there. There is no need for us to invent new ways and culture. We only need to drop what is considered not good and improve the copied culture which can bring benefits.

The Arabs during the pre-Islamic days were ignorant. They were so influenced by their tribes that they never stopped fighting among themselves. They must have forgotten the reasons that led to them being enemies, but their enmity and fights continued.

Their culture was uncivilised and hostile. They often killed their daughters. They did not respect women, seeing them as an asset that was changeable with other goods and as the slaves of the family.

In short, the Arabs before Islam were left behind, unprogressive, unrespected by anyone, ignorant, uneducated and illiterate. This was the culture of the pagan Arabs.

Later on these ignorant Arabs accepted Islam which not only advocated faith in one God Allah and his Messenger Muhammad, but also noble values. They were united in Islam to the extent they became brothers, respected the women, gave priority to justice, appreciated and respected the Quran and other holy books, they considered knowledge important and they sought knowledge which had been explored by the Greeks and other races.

The Arab culture changed radically after they embraced Islam. From ignorant and weak people and only knowing how to live in the desert in a primitive way, they succeeded in building an empire which almost covered the entire world at that time, that was before America was discovered.

They not only managed to acquire knowledge in science, mathematics, geography and other old knowledge possessed by the Greeks and Romans, but also explored new knowledge like sailing, astronomy, algebra and logarithm. They recorded their researches until many scientists from Europe went to learn their knowledge from their madrasah.

They were advanced in all aspects. They could use iron and minerals to the extent that Damascus was known for its high quality steel, glass and ceramic, buildings decorated with Arabesque inscription and gardens which had fountains whose water was derived from a far away mountain.

These people of the desert were successful in the agricultural field in countries they conquered like Spain. Their sailors sailed to the East up to the islands in the Malay Archipelago and to the West and up to Spain.

Their traders were successful all over the world. Alkaf and Alsagoff are names of Arab traders who were rich and at one point controlled the entrepot trade in Singapore and Jawa.

The culture absorbed by the pagan Arabs after they accepted Islam clearly made them successful in this world. Therefore it is not true the claim that Islam is a religion strictly for the world hereafter.

That was the effect of the acceptance of Islam and Islamic culture on the Arabs who were uncivilised and ignorant. From an unprogressive race and one who only knew how to fight among themselves, they became a race who was united and were far advanced than Europeans during that era.

Today, the Arabs are considered backward, found to have been left far behind in all aspects. They are being humiliated and often fooled by Europeans who at one time conquered all Arab nations.

Why did this fate befall them while they are still Muslims? Is Islam and the Islamic culture not suitable anymore in this modern time?

The answer is although the Arabs are Muslims, they have ignored many of the teachings of the religion. For example, while Islam professes that Muslims to unite as brothers, the Arabs not only do not act like brothers, but even fight among themselves. They return to their uncivilised ways by being permanent enemies between one Islamic Arab country with another. Money and weapons are used to fight and kill fellow Muslims. The non-Muslims are taken as partners to fight with other Muslims.

Wars are normally influenced by greed, the desire to get the wealth of other Muslim countries or due to different political ideologies. Sometimes the excuse given was that the other parties were less Islamic, had deviated and could not be regarded as brothers in Islam anymore.

Small groups in the Muslim community who were frustrated because their opinion of Islam was not accepted by the society terrorised and killed other Muslims blindly.

Knowledge that is said to be related to Islam is not sought anymore. Certainly studies and explorations in science and other fields are not given attention by Arab Muslims and non-Arabs. As such, the Muslims become backward, weak and depend on others, including those who are their foes, for almost all their requirements and defence in this modern era.

While they reject knowledge that is considered non-Islam, they unashamedly buy and use the products derived from the non-Muslim knowledge, including weapons to kill other Muslims.

Concentration and attention are on small matters which are insignificant in the progress of Muslims or protecting them. Though Islam has freed women from the culture of the uncivilised Arabs, injustice to women has resurfaced so much so there were those who said that all social problems

were the result of women. So, attempts were made to segregate them so that they could not seduce men. But men do not become better because of this action.

We feel ashamed to mention it, but in our country certain crimes which are caused by sexual desire occur more often among the Malays who are Muslim than the non-Muslims.

Islamic teachings are not wrong. The fault is with us who pay attention to the question of covering the aurat more than from the effect of covering the aurat of our moral. Just like the horses and swords which are no more effective for defence, covering the aurat of Muslims is not effective anymore in containing the lust in the multi-racial society. This is because today many Muslims visit the countries of non-Muslims who adopt different cultures. The mass media has made the prohibition to cover the aurat not implementable.

This method in handling problems is similar to trying to prohibit the enemies from using modern weapons because we want to use swords and horses.

Because of this, the Muslim Arabs who were advanced in the past are backward. The Muslim empire established by the generation of pagan Arabs who embraced Islam are not around anymore.

Those who wished to revive the glory of Islam and the Muslims by following the interpretation of the Islamic teachings during the Islamic glorious period were obstructed.

Others only try to pacify their hearts by claiming that the progress of the non-Muslims is actually not progress. They also try to claim directly or indirectly that the world is not for Muslims. The world hereafter is theirs, as if they know they are sinless although they ignore many of the important teachings of Islam.

We are Malays who are Muslims. More than the Arabs or other races who are Muslims, Malay nationalism is directly associated with Islam. A person is not a Malay unless he is a Muslim. That is our stand towards Islam.

If the pagan Arabs who accepted Islam could become so advanced and strong until they succeeded in building the Islamic Empire is it not possible the Malays with such a strong faith in Islam can also enjoy progress and successes as the pagan Arabs who embraced Islam?. Is it not possible that the culture of the Malays change so that it is consistent with the progress and successes which at one time were found among the Muslims?

We Malays do not intend to build an empire. Our aspiration is moderate. We like to be just as progressive as other races who have progressed. With that we can redeem the dignity of our race, to a certain extent the dignity of our religion and even the dignity of Bumiputeras in this country.

For more than 50 years Umno has struggled to redeem the dignity of the Malays. Umno's struggle cannot be separated from the struggle of Muslims because it is clear that when Umno succeeds, when Malaysia succeeds, the world acknowledges Islam has succeeded.

Although there are many non-Muslims in Malaysia, this does not deny the fact that Malaysia is a country led by Muslims. Actually there has been no Islamic country led by Muslims that has been considered successful. What more with our country where the Muslims who form the majority group need to lead the non-Muslims without causing adverse effect on the country's Islamisation and promoting it. However, without using force, Umno has succeeded.

We are not shouting that we are the hero of the Muslims. But Malay nationalism and Islam cannot be separated. When the Malays succeed Muslims succeed too as all Malays are Muslims. There is no need for us to make

noise, beat our chests and shout "We are the Muslim fighters".

But we certainly know that we have not succeeded enough. To really redeem the dignity of race and religion, our progress must at least be on par with those said to be advanced in this world, those respected, even feared by all, including Muslims and Islamic countries.

It is clear that our struggles have not ended yet and will not possibly end in a short period because we are pursuing a moving target, a target which does not wait for us.

From what I have mentioned on the role of culture, on the successes of progressive people, on the impact Islam had on the uncivilised Arabs and the developments in the history of Islam during the glorious period and during backward time, it is clear that we can achieve progress if we are prepared to change and form a culture suitable to achieve successes.

Our capabilities are not less than those of others who are now progressive. Not the colour of the skin or weather or race which determine achievements. Certainly it is not Islam which is an obstacle to progress. What obstruct progress is the culture we have formed for ourselves, which we consider suitable with Islam and giving identity to the Malays; this culture has obstructed our progress to a level which is our aspiration.

It is not that the culture is all unsuitable. If it is 100 per cent not suitable, we certainly would not have reached today's level. But to place our race on par with those who have advanced in this world and so that we are not humiliated and oppressed by other races, we must consciously and wisely form a culture which can ensure that we can achieve the objective of becoming a progressive race.

In this effort Umno must become the pacesetter and pioneer. If Umno does not dare to show good examples, believe me our race will become backward, left behind, laughed at by others and humiliated. We are not arrogant but there is no other party or organisation which can and has the opportunity to form a new culture for the Malays so that they can face the challenge of the modern world, especially in the information technology era which knows no borders among countries.

Many things have been done by Umno so far. The Malay culture in this era is not the same as the culture of the Malays when Malaysia was colonised, in fact not even the same with the Malay culture when we were fighting for independence and during the early post-independence period. The greater part of the new Malay culture was formed consciously and often unconsciously too by Umno and the change in the country's social, political and economic climate brought about by the administration of Umno's leadership.

Generally the change of culture among the new Malays has helped made them successful. Today they do not drop out, are not isolated from the country's economy, politics and social development.

In business and industries, they have shown the capabilities we do not even expect they would have. They managed to acquire the knowledge and skills which they themselves believed before were possessed by others. They do not feel inferior and shy as before when the country's wealth was almost 100 per cent owned by others. Generally they have more or less succeeded in redeeming the dignity of their race.

But they also have to admit that not all the new culture is good. There are many elements which are not good in the new Malay culture. If in the past the Malays were not involved in negative activities such as dadah addiction, today the majority of dadah addicts are Malay youths. It is the same with AIDS, social crimes such as rapes, dumping of babies, child and wife battering, slandering and many other things.

We are worried with these elements, the efforts to establish a new enough for us to promote them fully and make them a progressive race.

That is why we are very serious about the problem of corruption in the administration and in the party as well as the problem of money politics. Corruption will cause the greedy, those without morals and the unqualified, to be chosen as party and government leaders. This kind of people will always abuse power to enrich themselves while in position and to ensure that they would continue to get support. The people will be bribed with the Government's money which should be used for national development, for the prosperity of the people.

Corruption will only benefit certain people, people who can use their power as a leader for their own interest. It is not possible for all the people to benefit. The majority of the people will be disappointed. Everything will be more expensive because the element of corruption needs to be included.

If it is not curbed, corruption will spread and become a normal practice by those who hold any position. An office boy can also force a client to bribe him in order for something to be done. And those at the top will not prevent him from accepting bribes because they would also want their share. And on until the Minister and Prime Minister.

It is not possible for these people who accept bribes known by all officers and staff members to prevent and discipline any of their subordinate.

All costs involving Government dealings will go up because of bribery for those at all levels - officers, staff members and Minister. And then the banks will be involved and capital costs and every loan will become more than the cost of interest.

Bribery to bank officers, known as 'football money' was very widespread not so long ago. Whenever something is in shortage and difficult to obtain, there is a need for bribery to get it, even though it is from businessmen. This is also the same with essential services from the Government or private sector.

In short when corruption becomes part of the national culture, every cost, from Government dealings to the production of goods or services and selling prices, will increase. Every type of work will take a longer time to be done.

There is no certainty in any dealings, in terms of cost or time. It is not possible to achieve efficiency and all development will be interrupted.

Trade in and outside the country will be difficult and not competitive because of the high cost and inefficient service. In the end the performance of national development will decline.

Everyone will be poor although earnings are high because everything is expensive. Those involved in corruption will also face the consequences because they are living in a poor and backward country and they will be looked down by other people and other races.

Corruption is not the only cultural practice which can destroy us. There are other bad practices and values that can destroy us. And we must eliminate these bad values.

But we cannot be passive, protecting ourselves from the negative. If we want to advance we need to plan and implement a strategy that can enable us to advance.

Here we need to determine our objective and strategy. Do we really want to become an advanced race or isn't this important or necessary to be attained because progress does not bring about any advantage.

Many have said that we should be satisfied with what we have. In fact, some have claimed that fate has determined what we have and we should just be thankful. The little that we have cannot increase (Rezeki secupak tidak akan menjadi segantang). Poverty in life will be rewarded with wealth in

the hereafter. Humiliation in this world will be rewarded with greatness in the hereafter.

We will reject this claim. But our attitude of not wanting to work hard, easily satisfied, quick to waste when we are a little well-off, quick to move from chasing wealth to chasing fun which is sometimes forbidden, shows that we have not absorbed honourable values that give priority to dignity more than fulfilling desires.

The little wealth that we are enjoying has already destroyed our morals and our young generation. They loaf around, are involved in bohsia, use drugs and so on. Are we really convinced that the progress that we have attained can be perpetuated by those who will inherit from us.

If we really want to progress, because progress in this world is equally important with happiness in the hereafter; if we want to progress because we value our integrity; if we want to progress because we want to be master in the true sense; then we have to be sure that we are capable and in a position to be 'master'. It is useless if we claim ourselves to be 'master' while we and our people are easily oppressed and humiliated.

To be 'master' we need to have certain qualities. We have to have certain knowledge and efficiency. We will not acquire knowledge and efficiency if we are not prepared to pursue them through the right way and approach.

From the history of Islam, we know that Muslims were able to acquire knowledge pioneered by Greek philosophers. Because the Greeks did not write in Arabic, the Arabs must have surely learnt Greek to learn and acquire the knowledge of the Greeks.

It is the same with us. If we want to acquire knowledge and efficiency of foreigners, then we must be prepared to learn foreign languages. The higher our command of a particular language, the easier it is for us to acquire knowledge pioneered in that language.

The view that we can only be nationalists if we understand only our language is wrong. Whether or not we are prepared to admit it, the reality is that much of the knowledge we need for progress is not pioneered or documented by us. We are not even able to translate vital knowledge because in order to translate we need people who are experts in three things - in his own language, in a foreign language and highly educated in that field of knowledge. We do not have these people. Even if we do, they are doing other work which under existing conditions, we regard as more important.

We cannot wait for the time when we can get enough of these experts. Knowledge and sophisticated technology are not static. More so than in the past, new knowledge and technology is created so fast. In the micro-chip era which increases manifold in strength every 18 months, technology will expand more rapidly.

It is not possible for us to have enough experts to translate into our language every knowledge that is pouring out, the result of other people's research and pioneering. If we wait, we will be left behind, we will be backward, and will not understand the spread of knowledge and technology, past, present and future.

Our race will be a primitive race, to be fooled, humiliated and oppressed by others. We may be more nationalist in our view. But a nationalist who accepts being humiliated is not a nationalist.

The true nationalists are those who work hard to advance their race and are capable of competing successfully with those who have progressed. A true nationalist is one who is respected because he is part of a successful race who can defeat others in any field. A true nationalist is one who can ensure that his race will be respected and held in esteem, through what he has excelled in.

Having command of other languages does not make us less of a nationalist or less patriotic than nationalists who only have command of their own language. If it is to the dignity of our race that we know another language and the knowledge in that language, then we will not be less nationalistic or patriotic than the nationalists who are only fluent in their own language and do not possess knowledge that can contribute towards the redemption of the dignity of the race. Actually, those who know other languages and certain knowledge are far more nationalist than those who are only capable of shouting about their nationalism.

In our effort to redeem our dignity, it is very important that we acquire knowledge in whatever language. If we need to prepare a certain time for this purpose, then we should be prepared for it.

Diligence, determination and patience or time are needed to learn something. If we do that, God willing, we will succeed, we will develop our race, we will become the true master. If that is our dream.

The acquisition of knowledge has to be done from a young age. The Unmanned Government has already provided facilities needed for the learning of knowledge and languages of knowledge. But many parents have different views. They are not interested to see their children acquire vital knowledge for the progress of the race and country. Instead, they want their children to supposedly realise the spirit of Malay nationalism. They do not give encouragement to their children to learn English, for example, seriously. They also do not give attention to their children's work and performance in school. That is why there are so many pupils and students of our race who are all over shopping complexes after school or sometimes during school hours.

Many parents want their children to be religious. Because of this, many talented children are not able to acquire knowledge in other fields. Later, when they pass their religious studies, they find that they do not have that many opportunities to work in fields that offer a high income. They feel disappointed that society is not fair to them. And they are angry with society especially other people who have studied other fields and who are leading a better life than them. And they are angry with the Government which they have stamped as secular. It is in troubled waters that many will try to fish.

It is not that we do not give attention to religious education. Actually, the facilities provided for the learning of religion are better now than before. Anyone who wishes to study religion can study it to the highest level. But, what will happen to the Muslim society if the knowledge that they have is only limited to that related to only religion, *usuluddin* and *fiqh*.

There are no doctors, engineers, army chiefs, businessmen and entrepreneurs, farmers and other people among them important for the prosperity of society. Surely, a society that is limited to religious people only will be rigid and weak. They can pray for everything from God but Allah SWT has said in the Quran that He will not change our fate if we do not work hard to change it ourselves. It is clear then that prayers alone will not make us successful and happy.

It is certainly not true that all Malays send their children to study only religion. Many are learning other things too. But we are in need more of those educated in fields of knowledge that can help us successfully compete with others. Only when we have enough of them to save us, can we then say that we have fulfilled *fardu kifayah*. If there are not enough, then we have sinned.

Defending the *ummah* is something that is compulsory for Muslims. Those involved in defending the *ummah* are actually helping society fulfil *fardu kifayah*, that is, in carrying out religious obligation. Because of them,

the Muslim community will be saved. And because of them, the Muslim community is free of committing sins.

Those who deliberately do not work hard to fulfil fardu kifayah that is so heavy, are surely sinning. Those who only wish to see their children become experts in religion only and neglect the security and prosperity of the ummah are surely not following the teachings of Islam.

To ensure that we succeed in our defence, we no longer need a horse and a sword. We need sophisticated weapons. We cannot depend on the supply from others who have other interests. To invent and produce weapons and defence equipment, we need all sorts of knowledge which is not specifically related to religion. Therefore, there is a need for more of our children to be encouraged to command these fields of knowledge as fulfilling religious requirements, as a religious obligation.

Comments about religious education is very sensitive. If anyone says that Muslims should learn other things than religion, he will be condemned and regarded as not so Islamic.

Parents who send their children to study religion are regarded as people who obey the requirements of Islam. In fact, those who give priority to saving and defending Islam and Muslims and have their children learn certain knowledge, are no less Islamic, but are fulfilling an obligation by helping to fulfil fardu kifayah.

So too is the religious adherence of political parties and the Government which urges more Muslim children to study knowledge which can save and strengthen the Muslim community and Islam. Because many governments of Muslim countries neglect this need Islamic nations today are oppressed and Islam, humiliated. Are those who cause Muslim nations to be oppressed and Islam to be humiliated better than those who protect the dignity of Islam and Muslims?

Umno as a political party should not fear allegations that we do not give priority to Islam. When we plan the Multimedia Super Corridor, we are actually working hard to save Muslims during an era that is challenging now and in the future. Without any knowledge of information technology and ways to use it to strengthen Muslims and their adherence to Islam, we will not only be left behind but exposed to attacks on our way of life, religion and culture.

In fact, the CD-ROM technology has already made it easier for us to learn Islamic teachings and to spread these teachings. It is easier to listen to the Al-Quran and its accurate interpretations through the computer than just to read the Al-Quran. It is such a waste for us if we read the Al-Quran as an obligation but not wish to know its contents.

It is true that there is a possibility that our MSC project will be misused or will give rise to undesired things. But if we do not know about multimedia technology and management, there is a greater possibility that we will not be able to control the negative elements and we cannot use the technology for our good.

We certainly know that if we do not have control over the ways and technology of television, for example, we will be exposed to purely foreign propaganda and culture. But because we know how to manage and use television, we therefore are able to reduce the negative effects from foreign propaganda and use it for our benefit.

So it is with information and multimedia technology. If we do not have control of this technology, then we will be attacked by all types of information which is useless, and can destroy and damage our morals and culture. The Multimedia Super Corridor is a project to enable us to have control of the latest technology and use it for our benefit.

Indeed it is easy to discredit the Multimedia Super Corridor by claiming that the Serambi Mekah is better, but the claim to make Kelantan a Serambi

Mekah is something that has long been done. What we see now are the incidents of drug abuse, AIDS and khalwat happening more in Kelantan than in other States. The claim to have Kelantan under a certain political party as Serambi Mekah is merely a political propaganda which uses as a tool the strong adherence Malays have to Islam for the political interest of people who are willing to see Muslims become backward and suffer as long as these people can enjoy high positions.

Of late, all sorts of fatwa on matters related to the lifestyle of Muslims in Malaysia have been made. Under Islamic laws in the Federal Territory, the mufti makes a fatwa which is later to be endorsed by a fatwa council, chaired by the same mufti. When it is endorsed and declared or gazetted, the fatwa then becomes law.

But the same laws also provide that the mufti can nullify his fatwa or any other fatwa issued before that by him or another mufti. This provision wrong or not suitable which needs to be nullified. In other words, the law admits the possibility that fatwa issued could be wrong. The power of the mufti in making and annulling fatwa is very big.

The mufti is a position created by the rulers of Muslim countries after the death of the Prophet to help make decisions related to religious matters. The post of mufti was needed because of the tendency of people claiming themselves as ulama to make fatwa and individual interpretations which were often conflicting among themselves and confused Muslims. With the existence of mufti, then the Mufti Department alone could make and nullify a fatwa. In this way, there would not be conflicting fatwa in relation to the same matter.

Throughout the history of Islam, many fatwa were accepted and used and were later nullified and disregarded. So it was with the forbidence in Islam to carve the face and shape of human beings or animals. The reason was that long ago, the Arabs and the followers of other religions liked to worship idols which they carved to resemble man or animals. There were also those who carved and drew the faces of their gods and later worshipped these carvings and pictures.

To prevent Allah from being associated with other objects or attempts to create an image of Allah to be later worshipped, Islam forbids the carving or drawing of the face and shape of humans or animals. Until the end of the Muslim Empire of Turkey, this ban was enforced.

But in this age, this can no longer be enforced in the entire Islamic world because of the existence of cameras and television. Pictures of Islamic personalities and ulama can be obtained just anywhere.

Are Muslims then no longer obeying Islamic laws in relation to the carving and drawing of humans and animals? In this matter, we should refer back to the reason why the law to forbid it was made. The reason was to prevent the jahiliah Arabs who embraced Islam from returning to their worshipping of idols, drawings and so on which they were doing before.

If we make statues or pictures and we worship them, then we have indeed violated Islamic teachings. But we are not the jahiliah Arabs who just embraced Islam. We know how to differentiate between the God whom we worship, that is Allah SWT and the carvings or pictures which we do not equate with God and we do not worship. We do not also violate this law forbidding the carving or drawing of God or the Prophet. Therefore we are not violating the meaning and intention of this law forbidding the carving and drawing of humans and animals. We do not worship any carving or drawing as God or as the symbol of our God.

Nevertheless, many Muslims regard the intention or meaning of a law in Islam as not important. What is important is only the way or approach. By giving priority to ways, the meaning and intention of Islamic teachings often are not achieved.

Islam is not a religion of obligatory rituals which need to be carried out without considering that a particular intention is required to be carried out. Everything that is asked by Islam is connected with the prosperity in the life of Muslims. That was why every time the jahiliah Arabs embraced Islam, they achieved extraordinary progress.

But in time, the priority given to the obligation of making rituals and what was related to the form and shape of Islam became stronger. The attire of the Arabs during the Prophet's time and several centuries after that, and worn by all Arabs, Muslim or Christian, was made a symbol of Islam. And Muslims wore this attire but they were often at war among themselves without regard to the heavier requirement in Islam for Muslims to be kind.

In the question of security, Muslims were asked to have horses and swords to frighten their enemies. In this age, horses and swords will not frighten anybody. If we adhere to the instruction that we have a horse and sword, then today, we will not be able to do anything because our enemies are not afraid of horses and swords. But if we concentrate on the intention contained in the Quranic verse for us to frighten our enemies, then we will surely have ready a battle force equipped with sophisticated weapons that can frighten our enemies.

It is the same with covering the aurat. The intention for this is because during the time of the Prophet, the jahiliah Arabs were lustful to the extent that they often abducted and raped women from other tribes. The result was unending wars among themselves.

But, in this age in Malaysia, we are very strong about the covering of aurat. Severe punishment is set for those who violate the law on this. That people who cover their aurat abandon babies, abuse and kill children, rape and commit all sorts of sexual crimes, we do not relate it to the intention of covering the aurat. Just like preparing a horse and a sword to frighten one's enemy, and the carving and drawing of humans and animals not to be worshipped, the covering of aurat has lost its effect.

This does not mean the Al-Quran is wrong. We are wrong because we give priority to the covering of aurat and not to the fight against sexual crimes which are the primary intention of Islamic teachings. Just like pictures and carvings which we can no longer prevent, the exposure of aurat can be seen by all Muslims in this age. The stress should be on Islamic moral education and not showing the differences between Muslims and non-Muslims because this cannot prevent sexual crimes which are widespread in Muslim society.

Because of the wrong emphasis, because of priority given to ways and not intention, that today's Muslims are in conflict among themselves, disunited and weak. The real enemy we do not care about. Friends and kins of the same religion are condemned and made enemies because they are regarded to be less Islamic.

In the entire Muslim world, this is what is happening. As long as something is claimed to be a requirement in Islam, other actions which are clearly unIslamic, are allowed (halalkan). Just like fitnah, slander and allegations made to the extent that the killings of other Muslims are permitted because of the pursuit of what is claimed to be demanded by Islam.

Covering the hair on the head has the same intention as covering aurat which is to prevent sexual crimes. No one is preventing this practice but many wish to force more than what is asked to the extent that children and the elderly are made to cover their heads. And we should not forget that those who cover their heads have also committed sexual crimes, not less than those who do not cover their heads. This is because we give priority to covering the head and not fighting sexual crimes. As long as we cover

our head, we have perfected our amalan.

Meanwhile, the Islamic teaching on kinship among Muslims, on not to shame or disappoint others, on defending the ummah, on justice, on preventing chaos in society, on happiness and prosperity in the life of Muslims, is neglected. Muslims then become weak and without knowledge, fooled and humiliated by the enemies of Islam. All this is not because Islamic teachings are wrong, but because emphasis is given to only half of the teachings of Islam that is to the ways and not the meaning and intention of Islamic teachings.

I realise that what I am saying will not make many people comfortable, including Umno members. But we are facing a problem of increasing intolerance to anyone who does not give priority to the form and shape of Islam to the point that the sunat is made compulsory and the wajib (compulsory) is enhanced and tightened further, with the claim that anyone who does not carry it out is not Islamic or murtad (an apostate).

In several other Muslim countries, the fanatic groups are prepared to kill people of the same faith because they want to seize power to implement their opinion. In Malaysia, groups like these have already reached a level of slandering and denying the 'Muslimness' of others. If left like this, we will also become like certain Muslim countries which are already weak and oppressed by foreign powers. We have to defend the true Islamic teachings before tragedy befalls us.

Malaysia is regarded by other Muslim countries as an exemplary country. This is not our claim. In newspapers in Muslim countries, in the speeches of their leaders, and in their talks with us and with others, they not only state that Malaysia is an example to other Muslim countries, but they are very proud of and awed by Malaysia as a progressive Muslim country. And they ask for the formula of success of a Muslim country which has many non-Muslims.

The reason they are awed by and proud of Malaysia is not that we have exhibited the kind of Islam which is extreme but that we practise moderation in Islam. Malaysian Muslims have successfully dealt with the problem of ruling a multi-ethnic and religious population. They, the non-Muslims, believe the way we implement Islamic laws to be very good because it is clear that it has brought peace and progress to our country which they admit and regard as a Muslim country as we have officially recognised.

They are actually very disappointed with the action and opinions of the groups among the Muslims who are too extreme to the extent of being violent in the name of Islam and put emphasis on trivial issues in their community. They wish to see Islamic policies and practices like those in Malaysia practised by their people. The leaders of their governments also wish for that.

If those who lead and live in Muslim countries are overwhelmed by our moderate Islamic ways, why then do we wish for extreme ways which have caused other Muslim countries to face problems and not develop. Why are there among us who like better Islamic symbols like attire and sporting beards and not concentrate on more serious matters for Muslims like kinship and defence. Do they like us to be disunited and weak to the extent that we will be oppressed by others who have their own interest and who like to see us continue to be weak.

Who is the one to be truly fighting for Islam? Those who give priority to what they regard as Islamic symbols or the Government and Umno which give priority to the defence and prosperity of Muslims in this country and more or less in other countries too.

I have taken quite a long time to discuss matters related to the Islamic religion and practices in this country. In this regard, there will be

those who hold the opinion that as a person who has not studied religion specifically and does not understand Arabic, I have therefore no right to speak on Islam.

I would like to stress that the split among Muslims into several mazhab (schools of thought) and groups with all sorts of practices and understanding, while there is only one Islamic religion, was caused by the interpretations and teachings of others who specialised in religion and understood the Arabic language. Understanding the religion and Arabic language does not guarantee that their interpretations and teachings were accurate, true and similar. In fact, because of specific interests, there were among them who wrongly interpreted the teachings of Islam.

Saidina Abu Bakar, the first Caliph of the Muslims, was also prepared to be criticised if he did something wrong. But there are people with little knowledge of Islam and Arabic who claimed they could not be criticised. Are they then bigger than Saidina Abu Bakar? Can they so easily accuse other people as kafir (infidel), murtad and firaun? Have those whom they accused no right to defend themselves?

Muslim leaders and society not only have the right but the responsibility to lead the Muslim community. If the leaders find that there are teachings which are wrong or which disregard matters important to Muslims, Muslim leaders not only should criticise but must criticise.

Muslims today are oppressed and humiliated because the leaders of Muslim countries do not criticise Islamic teachings and practices that can easily weaken and disunite Muslims. Until today Muslims in Malaysia are not attacked by diseases that have struck many other Muslim countries. All this while we do not have an extremist group that attacks and slaughter other Muslims who do not accept their teachings. But, we can see those who are interested in this extremist way, who want our Muslim society to give priority to the prevention of small sins while the bigger sins are committed. This flow must be curbed and Umno as the ruling party which is responsible must be brave to fight this unhealthy trend.

It is 40 years since Umno has led the Government which rules a multi-racial and religious country. Throughout the history of independent Malaysia we have seen how our country which was backward and weak freed from the shackles of colonialism, advanced and progressed until it has become an exemplary country to other developing countries.

Although the Malaysian population is made up of many races diverse in religious worship, language and culture, the Umno-led Government has been able to safeguard peace.

The Malays and other Bumiputera who are weak in terms of economy, have been absorbed in the trade and industry community until distinction is no longer glaring between them and other ethnic groups in terms of efficiency and acquisition of sources of wealth.

Although from the beginning there were attempts to split the Malays through religious politics, this attempt failed. The majority of Malays had a moderate attitude as is required in Islam, and not an extreme attitude that is condemned in Islam.

Because of all 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 found in many other developing countries, including many Muslim countries.

Because of this we can plan to further develop our country so that it can become an advanced country by 2020. Whether we can achieve this objective depends on many factors. From outside the country, there are many enemies who would like to colonise us again indirectly. They are helped, consciously or unconsciously, by groups in the country inclined to

extremist ways and not tolerant, including Muslim groups who 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 as unIslamic.

We in Umno need to deal with every threat for the freedom and peace of our country and the prosperity and security of Muslims and other ethnic groups in our country. I believe that if we allow extremist groups to do as they pleased without fear, we will be just like several Muslim countries which today face chaos, riots, are weak and oppressed by bigger powers.

Umno's responsibility is big. The challenges which we have faced and overcome in the past are small compared to the challenges ahead. If we are not brave, if we lack conviction of the truth and honour of our struggle, if we are preoccupied with wealth and materialism, if we are involved in corruption, if we allow people who use religion to act wildly, then the 51 years of our struggle for religion and race will be futile.

(END)