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Reject extremism, Malays told

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday urged the Malays to reject some basic beliefs about religion and culture which he said may have obstructed their progress and could lead them back to backwardness.

In a thought-provoking address to Umno delegates in Kuala Lumpur yesterday, Dr Mahathir said the Malays' strive for progress could stall if they allow themselves to be frustrated in their efforts or if they were complacent in their success.

Herein lies the need for the Malays to reject extremism, to be always moderate and to continue believing in their ability to achieve the objectives they have set out to reach, the Umno president said when opening the party's general assembly.

In an address which was largely focussed on the state of the Malay/Bumiputera social and cultural beliefs and behaviours, Dr Mahathir touched on wide-ranging issues affecting the behaviour of Malays as Muslims and the champions of Islam - as a race trying to catch up with other races in this country in terms of socio-economic development, as a race leading a country that must deal with attempts by outside parties to dominate and indirectly colonise this nation.

"We, the 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," he said.

Dr Mahathir said 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, the fact that Malaysia is a country led by Muslims cannot be denied. 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 heroes 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," he added.

On culture, Dr Mahathir said: "We can achieve progress if we are prepared to change and develop a culture suitable to achieve successes.

"Our capabilities are not less than those of others who are now progressive. It is not the colour of the skin or weather or race which determine achievements. Certainly it is not Islam that is an obstacle to progress.

"What obstruct progress is the culture we have developed 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."

Dr Mahathir said Umno has done a lot to improve the position of the Malays and Muslims as well as the country.

"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 and are not isolated from the country's economic, political and social mainstream.

"In business and industries, they have shown the capabilities we do not even expect they would have. They have managed to command 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."

However, Dr Mahathir said the new culture is still far from perfect. For example, the majority of the dadah addicts are Malay youths and the Malays do not seem to be able to rid themselves of AIDS, social crimes such as rapes, dumping of babies, child and wife-battering, and slandering.

"We are worried with these elements, the efforts to establish a new culture among the Malays may not be succeed or may be half successful, not enough for us to promote them fully and make them a progressive race," he added.

To rid of these negative elements in the new Malay culture requires the Malays to determine their objective and strategy, and for them to rethink some of their old beliefs.

"Many of us claim that fate has determined what we have and we should just be thankful; that the little we have cannot be increased; that poverty in life will be rewarded with wealth in the hereafter; that humiliation in this world will be rewarded with greatness in the hereafter.

"We will reject this claim."

Dr Mahathir said Malays also need to increase their appetite for knowledge and their desires to master languages in order to succeed. The pursuit of religious education must be matched by striving hard for other knowledge and skills. The Malays, for instance, should prepare themselves to control and dominate information technology.

"The Multimedia Super Corridor is a project to enable us to have control of the latest technology and to 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 dadah 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," he said.

He urged Malays to educate and equip themselves with Islamic knowledge, not just its form but more importantly its essence.

"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)," he said.

Dr Mahathir said 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, he added, such groups 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," he added.

In this regard, Dr Mahathir said, Umno has a big responsibility.

"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."

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