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Struggle has not ended, PM tells Umno

IN A speech marking Umno's 51st anniversary yesterday, its president and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad called on party leaders and members to uphold the spirit that has prevailed since Umno was born in 1946 in meeting today's challenges.

He said while the issues facing the party may differ now, the basic struggle remains. "The struggle of the Malays has not ended."

Dr Mahathir urged the party to work hard to help check social problems, highlighting corruption as one of them.

"The spirit and unity shown by party members 51 years ago is the best weapon to overcome any obstacle that could threaten the survival of the Malays in future," he said in his keynote address at a gathering at Putra World Trade Centre in Kuala Lumpur to celebrate the party's 51st year.

The celebrations began with a flag-raising ceremony followed by the opening of the Umno Gallery and a forum on the history of Umno.

Tracing the progress that the party, the Malays and the country have made in the 51 years since Umno was formed, Dr Mahathir told his audience of the importance of history.

"We should know history because it guides us as to which direction we are to go. If we don't know where we come from, it will be difficult for us to determine where we are going," he said.

Dr Mahathir added: "It is possible that we think we are advancing but in truth we are moving backwards, because we don't know that it was our starting point. Therefore, history plays an important role in a nation. A nation that does not know its history cannot possibly attain development.

"Those who ignore the lessons of history may be condemned to repeat the mistakes of history over and over again".

And history, Dr Mahathir said, shows that the country has made much progress and is on its way to become a "giant", he added.

"If we are small and want people to know of our existence, we will have to shout out loud. However, if we are giants, we don't have to shout. All we have to do is stand and people will know we are there."

The Umno president, in illustrating how far Malaysia has progressed, recounted his experience while attending a recent dialogue among African countries. During the sessions, he said, the African leaders and officials were using Bahasa Malaysia words such as "terima kasih" (thank you).

"Our language has reached Africa. It is not because we shouted to be recognised but because we are close to becoming giants.

"Due to our achievements, people learn our language. If we are a developed nation - with high intellect, having created products that are known by others, able to produce things that we now only buy from others - we won't need to ask others to learn our language. People would want to learn and seek us.

"It is not just about languages. What is important is a nation that can reach a level so that it can be respected by others," Dr Mahathir said.

The important thing, he stressed, is to have the confidence that whatever another person does, "we can also do, and do it better."

Dr Mahathir reminded the party that Malaysia was different when it was a colony or even when it achieved its independence after some 400 years of being colonised.

"(Malaysia) was a nation that was looked down upon. We were looked extremely down upon by other nations... because of our level of

achievement.

"We were fishermen, farmers and a few (of us) government servants. There were none that were of high education, no professors. Probably only one with a Bachelor's degree," he said.

He added that after being colonised by the Portuguese, Dutch, British, Japanese and even the Thais, it was as though the country was non-existent.

"We were a colony. A nation of no status, so much so that everyone and anyone could have colonised us. And that was our mentality. We accepted the fact that we would be colonised forever. That was why the MacMichael Treaty between the British and the Malay Rulers stated that we will be under the British rule 'as long as there is the sun, the moon and the stars'. Until the end of the world, would we be a nation colonised.

"It never crossed our minds to include in the treaty that once we are capable of ruling our own country, we can ask for independence."

He added that feelings of being threatened and of self-awareness only started when the British formed the Malayan Union. The awareness that had formed Umno was to dispose of the Malayan Union.

Dr Mahathir also said that with capable leaders, the country did not succumb to extreme nationalism like other nations at that time.

"Extreme nationalism caused some countries to liberate the country of all forms of colonisation. They nationalised all estates, mines and foreign holdings.

"However, they could not afford to maintain the upkeep and therefore the economy of the countries deteriorated. In Malaysia, we did not nationalise but in turn encourage foreign investments," he said.

On the party's struggles, the Umno president said the objectives differ from time to time. There is need, therefore, to adjust.

"A nation that can stand as tall... as the other nations in the world. That is our aim. And that is why we have our Vision 2020," he added.

Dr Mahathir said the struggles of Malaysia today is different from the struggles in 1946. The main struggle now is to develop not only the nation but to avoid deterioration of the society.

"Umno's focus now is to combat social ills, including corruption and the moral crisis facing some of its youths. Although these ills are not serious yet, they have to be attended to," Dr Mahathir said.

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