

Keeping abreast with changing times

2/14/12/1998

Translation of Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's speech at the Umno special general assembly.

TODAY we meet with only one item on the agenda — to amend the Constitution of our party.

This is not the first time we are amending our Constitution. This time we are making changes because times change and our experience and the culture of our race have also changed. If our Constitution is not amended, our party will become stagnant or be destroyed if we cannot handle the various problems that emerge with the changing times, arising from national developments in politics, the economy, social and culture.

When Umno was formed, the Malays regarded the rulers as heads and leaders of their states. The people were not involved in politics — as a result they did not believe in leadership from the people, especially a leadership for the entire nation. Very few offered themselves to lead a political organisation that was required to oppose the colonialists, not even among the rulers. Finding a leader was a major problem for the Malays. When someone with talent and courage emerged, he was easily accepted without opposition.

This practice was continued until after the country gained independence. It was with such case that leaders were accepted, to the extent there was no challenge against the president, deputy and vice-presidents every-time there were elections for the Umno supreme council. So long as the office-bearers did not withdraw, the positions went uncontested. Only the ordinary seats on the supreme council were contested. There was no campaigning. Voting was done openly by a show of hands. After being elected, the winners were accepted by everyone as there were no factions in Umno.

Because of this, Umno was strong, cohesive and full of integrity. And it was Umno's integrity that caused the failure of the Malayan Union and led to the

one from the armed forces, police and administrators will respect directives from the government.

In many countries, the integrity of an organisation or individual who governs depends on the armed forces which are given a privileged position. This "palace guard" system which is responsible for protecting the leaders of the administration does not exist in Malaysia. What we have is only an ordinary military and

dence it is easy to gain the people's support. But after independence it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain that support because the people harbour hopes of change. Fulfilling their wishes is difficult if democracy is practised because democracy exposes a government to threats from the people. They will not extend support if their demands are not entertained. Unfortunately, their demands are not always in tandem with national in-

by a large section of the people, as when it fought for independence, will fail. Without a strong administration and political stability, the deteriorating economic and social fabric will continue and the country will not possibly be a successful nation at any time.

What I have summarised can be seen in countries that have attained independence after being colonised for a long time by Western powers. There is almost

strength of Umno as a political party. The strength of Umno is derived from the unity of the members and the loyalty of the members to the constitution of the party. The party cannot function if it is not well administered and its leadership not supported.

Once the leaders are elected, the support must be given to them. It is only through such way that the integrity is maintained. So long as he is leader, he must be continuously supported. The loyalty to the leader is not because of his physique but because of his personal character. The loyalty to him is because of the post, the post held by him according to the party constitution and process of party election. If he fails to maintain that trust from the party, then he must be dropped by the party in accordance to the constitution.

Cronyism and factionalism should not exist in the party. If these are practised, sooner or later, the party will split and grow weak.

This is because the victory of one faction will cause the defeated faction to withhold support. The winner will only enjoy the support of a section in the party. As such, it will become weak.

The true democratic culture requires an election to be carried out on friendly terms; that is a friendly competition. Inter-party election in a general election is different from internal polls. Within the party, the integrity of the party must be emphasised. The victory of a leader has no meaning if it results in the party becoming chaotic, weak and failure to win the general election and to form the government subsequently.

Democracy in the party must ensure that the integrity of the party is not undermined. To ensure this, election must be based on the character of the candidate, his ability and other qualities relevant in a leader. The question of loyalty to him as an individual or head of a faction should not arise or affect the election.

If the election is not based on

Asian countries. The economic growth of these nations and their successful rule pose a great challenge to their former colonialists. It seems that these countries are truly independent and a threat to the old powers in Europe and North America.

The success of these nations is not welcomed by the former colonialists. They want to ensure that these new countries which emerged from their former colonies will continue to be subservient to them. Even though in the beginning the world was of the opinion that no one should interfere in the domestic affairs of an independent nation, the Western powers managed to convince the global society that to monitor and check on abuses of human rights, they have the right to interfere in the domestic affairs of any country they want to.

Using such a claim, their propaganda machines will start making allegations that there were abuse of human rights in numerous places. Such is their arrogance that they were prepared to directly attack small nations and arrest their leaders, and they even took the president of a Latin American nation back to their country to be tried under their laws. They were not even concerned that the act was against international laws.

However, there are still countries which act independently. In the East, there are many such countries which are very developed to the extent that there were claims that the 21st century will be an Asian century, the time when Asia will control the world.

These claims have a basis as the Asian nations are large and have been able to acquire high technology and establish businesses which are spread throughout the world. The Asian citizenry are efficient and disciplined that it seems there are no skills that they are not capable of acquiring up to the highest level.

Witnessing these developments, the former Western colonialists started planning to colonise again.

country achieving independence. After Merdeka, Umno continued to be dominant and won election after election and governed the country, developed it and defended its independence.

Actually, the administration of the country during the early years of Malaysia's independence was not that difficult. Even though Umno did not have much experience in politics and administration, what it had was enough to cope with problems then. There were not many Malaysians, especially Malays, who had the necessary experience to head ministries, something that never existed during the colonial era. Nevertheless, Umno succeeded in leading the Alliance government and managed the country's politics democratically.

There were many other countries which also gained independence after World War Two but they failed to govern and develop themselves. The majority of them could not only not develop themselves but the level of development that was reached under the colonial masters declined, sometimes disastrously.

But Malaysia was a success in practising democratic politics and in development even though its people were made up of various races. The people enjoyed a better quality of life and were more prosperous. Elections were conducted without riots and killings that had characterised other newly independent nations. Only in 1969 did racial riots break out but these were resolved by an administration led by Umno. Foreign interference was not necessary.

All these achievements were the result of Umno's strength. Umno leaders were able to perform their tasks successfully because the party gave them undivided support that ensured that all government decisions were fully backed by everyone in the government and party.

If Umno is divided and its leaders do not receive a mandate and support from the party, no

police who do not profess any personal loyalty to any leader. They are professionals and act in accordance with the law and the structure of authority. Whoever heads the Government will be accepted by them as the authority.

As I said earlier, if there is no organisation with integrity, with legal standing and strongly backed by the people, the military, police and public administration will not respect and obey their instructions. But as we know, no one disputes the right and integrity of Umno which heads and exercises governmental authority in running the country. Even the rulers grant it this recognition.

We regard the role played by Umno and its leaders during the 1969 disturbances as ordinary. But the ability of the Umno leaders in handling the 1969 riots was really extraordinary. In our country, anarchy and chaos can occur if Umno does not remain united and does not accept the authority of the leadership in dealing with such disturbances.

It is the solidarity and discipline of Umno that has repeatedly enabled the country to overcome crises apart from allowing it to be administered and developed so successfully. Umno's solidarity also allowed political parties to form the Alliance and the Barisan Nasional. If not for Umno, the Alliance and Barisan Nasional would not have been formed and functioned effectively.

What I want to emphasise is the importance of Umno remaining united and upholding its integrity. If Umno weakens, and it will weaken if it is divided, then there will not be political stability or a government of integrity and authority.

It is also a normal thing for political parties which have fought for and gained independence for their countries to remain popular for a while. But this will not last. There are many reasons for this.

Firstly, when a political party is fighting for national indepen-

terests but are frequently based on group or sectoral interests. And these groups are constantly quarrelling.

Thus it is in a multiracial country like Malaysia, where conflicting interests between different communities force choices to be made whether the support of one community is more beneficial than another community. Whatever the choice made, support for the government will decline.

Secondly, the experience of a government that had just achieved independence was still shallow and as such, the aspirations of the people to enjoy the benefits from self-rule were often not fulfilled.

Thirdly, differences in opinion and the struggle among leaders to attain certain positions in the ruling party would occur. As time goes by, the party leaders become more ambitious. Their efforts to fight for posts will split the party and lead to factions.

Finally, the ruling party will break up into groups which will be weak. The integrity of the ruling party will be compromised. This will further affect the ability of the party to fulfill the hopes of the people.

With this, the party that fought for independence will end up hated by the people and will lose support. If a party has ruled for a long time, those outside the party are bound to be disappointed because they will not get positions. They will then instigate the people to go against the party. Unfortunately, the opposition parties and splinter parties also failed to garner enough strength. As a result, there is not one strong party that is capable of setting up a government with integrity. So, each time there is an election, the government will change but bring no changes.

Because of that, there is no political stability or effective administration. The country cannot be developed and the people will suffer.

Any attempts to set up a party with integrity that is supported

no integrity in the governance of the countries. At times, they disregard democracy to set up a one-party system or an authoritarian government. But these governments are exposed to the corruption of power and the development of the country cannot be carried out.

Until now, Malaysia has successfully established a government with integrity. The formula created by Umno founders is still being practised. Not only has Umno successfully maintained the party structure, it has also been able to work with other parties. However, the key to all this is an Umno with integrity.

So, this is the responsibility of every Umno member, in fact, the responsibility of every Malay and other bumiputras in Malaysia, to ensure that Umno remains strong. For this, we need two important factors. We need a good party structure. We need a party culture that is suitable with democratic practices.

At the time of Umno's establishment, there was no admission that the president of the party enjoys the right to be Prime Minister. But the success of Umno in the elections of our beloved country since independence has given the opportunity to the leadership of Umno to hold the post. It has become a tradition to the point that many believe that it is important to be the president of Umno. The post of prime minister will follow naturally.

It is true that the Umno president has the traditional right to become the prime minister of Malaysia but he can only hold the prime ministership if Umno wins the general election. Will Umno permanently win the elections and lead the Barisan Nasional? Will Barisan Nasional accept Umno if Umno is weak? Will Barisan Nasional continue to secure the majority of seats in every election?

The answers to these three questions depend on the

personal loyalty or to a faction, the party will be able to close ranks after the polls. There will be no feud by the loser and winner or their supporters. All members must then strengthen the party and give full backing to the chosen leader. Through this, the party will continue to be strong and capable of facing any party or national problems.

The global situation when we achieved independence 40 years ago and now is vastly different. But the dangers remain the same. When we founded Umno, the problems we faced were direct colonialism. Today, we are still exposed to the same colonialism.

After the Second World War, the world could no longer accept colonialism. The colonists were ashamed of their history of domination. They no longer acted like world powers. They did not want to involve themselves in the affairs of their former colonies. They appeared to have repented and did not want to colonise anymore.

But they were not sincere. Quietly, they attempted to weaken the newly freed countries by driving a wedge between the people, so that these countries were not well governed. When there were riots and civil war, they supplied the weapons. They even provided mercenaries to certain sides to capture power.

Their aim was to make sure that the ruler of the country became weak and can be used by them. Although the ruler concerned adopted authoritarian methods, these powers willingly supported the government so long as they are allowed to exploit the country's wealth. Indirectly, their domination continued.

But there were new independent countries that were able to manage and maintain self-rule successfully without depending on the former colonists. That is how these countries have been able to compete with their former colonial masters until now.

Most of these independent and successful nations are East

They will deny that they have such plans to block the progress of the Eastern nations. But we know, from their history in Asia and other territories, they do have a conspiracy to ensure they continue to dominate the world or at least to stop any possibility of them being challenged.

From history documented by an American writer, activities to bring down leaders in newly-independent countries were carried out in Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia and several other nations. No country is allowed to have peace and to progress unless the leaders can be made their puppet and used.

In a unipolar world, only one bloc takes control and nations are left without any options of crossing over to another bloc. Unfortunately, if nations are subjected to a single power, suppression will occur and development will be stopped. Colonisation or colonialism is alive and will continue to live even in the information era of the new millennium.

Malaysia is not strong. We are weak. Malaysia is a small nation with a multiracial population. Among this population is a bumiputra community with the majority being Malays. The Malays are the bulwark of the country's credibility.

It is very clear that to weaken and violate this country, the Malays must be divided and incapacitated. There are numerous ways to weaken the Malays. From the early days, the Malays were divided through the use of religion by certain people with vested interests. In the name of Islam, Malays became enemies of the Malays. However, thanks to the unity of the majority of Malays in Umno, the abuse of religion by certain quarters failed to weaken the Malays.

However, the seeds of disunity continue to be sown within the Malay community in Malaysia. These wait for an issue or opportunity to sprout amidst the cracks in Umno itself.

Dr Mahathir's speech (contd)

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The foreign powers are aware of this. They look for "credible" puppets. When they identify this puppet, they use his weakness to control him. Many approaches are used to ensure the puppet will follow their directive. Hence, special treatment is accorded him. Instruction is given until he and his cronies can voice out their desires. Finally, they hope this puppet will take over as the country's leader and follow their bidding. Indirectly, the colonisation of the country has taken place.

However, when the puppet they have been grooming for a long time suddenly loses the possibility of becoming the nation's leader, the anger of the foreign conspirators cannot be contained anymore and they then openly express their support for the attempt of their puppet to weaken the race which is the foundation of the nation's administration.

This is what is happening now. It is very clear that efforts to re-colonise the country are going on. They have been unsuccessful for now. But there is no guarantee such attempts will not recur.

The key to whether foreign efforts to re-colonise this beloved country are successful or otherwise lies in the hands of Umno members. As long as Umno is one and solid, as long as Umno's unity cannot be broken, the attempts by the foreign powers to weaken and re-colonise the country will be thwarted.

Umno is not an ordinary party. Umno is the backbone of the Barisan Nasional that governs the country. A weak Umno is a weak Barisan Nasional. A weak Barisan Nasional will weaken the Malaysian Government and a weak Malaysian Government will see Malaysia colonised.

Democracy is the best political system created by mankind. However, like any other man-made creation, democracy has its weaknesses and even negative aspects. The good or bad of democracy does not rely on the system or constitution or regulations. The good or bad of democracy lies in the practitioners of democracy themselves. If the practitioners of democracy are efficient and realise the limitations of democracy, know its setbacks, then the practice of democracy will bring positive effects. However, if the practitioners are only concerned with the freedom given and with that, ignoring the dangers of the freedom, then democracy will destroy its practitioners until they may not be rehabilitated again.

Amendments which will be tabled for consideration at this special assembly are meant to protect the party from the possibility of democratic freedoms within the party being abused. It is hoped these amendments will prevent practices and party procedures, including the election of its leaders, from being abused and cause a split and weaken the party.

These amendments have been scrutinised thoroughly and it is certain that all delegates to this meeting will scrutinise them further. There may also be amendments to be proposed to these amendments. We may amend the amendments or accept the proposals. But please be aware that the constitution will not safeguard the party's integrity or preserve the party. What will safeguard and preserve the party will be the members' ability to understand and use the approved constitution. If we are able to create a culture that gives priority to the party and its objectives, then the constitution which we will approve will be effective.

The culture meant here is a culture that gives priority to the party's struggle and not the interest of certain candidates. There may be those who think that their candidate is so good that if the candidate fails, the party will fail. This may be true. However, in their efforts to ensure the success of that particular candidate, their fanatical belief in the candidate will not bring any benefit to the party. What is more important is that we do not become overzealous to ensure the success of our candidate and if the candidate fails, then we must be prepared to accept those elected by the majority.

After the election is completed, we must close ranks and ensure that there are no gaps which can be exploited by our enemies. The tension which arose during the election must be forgotten and efforts must ensure the success of the party's objectives. Remember in politics, there are no permanent friends or permanent enemies. There is no guarantee that we will support the same candidate. As the saying goes, *sekali air bah, sekali pantai berubah*.

The party is important, not the individual. Individuals come and go but the party remains. The struggle is not over when an individual fails. But the struggle will be over if the party is destroyed.