

I will lead **country** out of downturn, says **PM** 06

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ALOR STAR: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday he and several leaders have taken upon themselves the task of steering the country out of the economic downturn.

The Prime Minister said he had taken up this task as his responsibility because the country's sovereignty and independence were at stake.

"However, this task can be performed better if the country remains politically united.

"We have to safeguard our political stability to prevent the West from taking away our independence through colonisation of our economy," he said when addressing more than 4,000 people at a "meet-the-people" session in Dewan Seri Negri here.

The Prime Minister said the West knew the country could be weakened if it "attacked" the biggest component party in the coalition government.

"They created some anger in Umno by whipping up all sorts of allegations against its leadership," he said, adding he was disappointed some Umno leaders provided a platform to the West by taking up the baseless allegations.

Dr Mahathir said throughout his 17 years as

prime minister, the economic downturn was the "biggest challenge" he had encountered.

He said the country was able to steer itself out of the economic problem in 1985 because it was simple then and there were not many difficulties,

"But now, it is a differ-

ent form of economic and currency manipulation," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the people would understand that the country was being "attacked" should the enemy use their military to conquer a country.

"However, when the enemy uses economic ma-

nipulation and currency trading as his tools to conquer a country, then it would be difficult to explain to the people," he said.

He said he had gone through four decades of colonisation and would not like to see the country colonised again.

"I fear that the country will lose its independence at a time when I am Prime Minister," he said.

He urged all Malaysians to stand united as this would be the only means of defence against any form of colonisation.

Dr Mahathir also touched on *Asiaweek's* internet poll, which concluded that Anwar was a better leader than him.

"It said that only 16% of Malaysians supported me and proposed that I should step down. However, today's turnout showed that they are interested to listen to this 72-year-old man," he said.

Also present were Menteri Besar Tan Sri Sanusi Junid and Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Abdul Hamid Othman.