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Amendments vital in keeping with the times

Dr Mahathir Mohamad

TODAY we are meeting here with only one agenda - that is to amend the party constitution, the United Malay National Organisation or Perembar, which is better known as Umno.

This is not the first time we are amending the party constitution. Our constitution has been amended before and this time (we are doing it again) because as time changes, our experience and culture change too. If the party constitution is not amended, our party will become dormant or fall into ruin as it cannot tackle various problems which emerge at different times, cannot keep up with the country's development in terms of politics, economy, social and culture, from the aspect of population and Umno's membership itself.

At the time when Umno was formed, the Malays only knew the rulers as heads of state and leaders. The people were not involved in politics, so they did not have faith in the leadership which came from among the people themselves, especially the leadership for the entire nation. Not many, even rulers, were keen to rise to lead a political organisation which was required to challenge the colonial powers. Finding leaders was a big problem to the Malays then. So, when someone capable and courageous came along, the person would be easily accepted without challenge.

This culture went on until after the country achieved its independence. It was so easy then to accept a leader to the extent that there would be no challenge for the posts of president, his deputy and vice-presidents during the Umno supreme council elections every year. As long as they remained in their positions, there would be no contest against the posts. Only the posts of supreme council members were contested. There was no campaign. Elections were conducted openly with show of hands. After being elected, none of them would be opposed by any party as there were no factions in Umno.

It was for these reasons that Umno was strong, solid and credible. And the credible Umno had succeeded in foiling the Malayan Union and in the struggle to achieve independence for the country. After independence, Umno continued to be credible and solid and succeeded in one general election after another and in the administration and development of the country, as well as in fulfilling the meaning of independence.

Actually, the country's administration in the early years of Malaysia's independence was not that complicated. Though Umno's experience in politics and administration was shallow, it was sufficient to tackle problems that were faced at that time. There were not many Malaysians, especially experienced Malays, who headed departments and definitely there were none who knew how to head a ministry, something that had never been created during the colonial period. Nevertheless Umno had succeeded in pioneering the Alliance Government and managed the country's politics democratically.

In fact, many countries also achieved independence after the Second World War but failed to be well administered and developed. The majority of them not only could not be developed, but the rate of development during the colonial period had in fact dwindled, sometimes very seriously.

But Malaysia, after its independence, has succeeded in practising democratic politics and managed to develop the country although the people are multi-racial. The people also enjoyed better life and are more prosperous. General elections can be held without riots and killings as

often occurs in newly independent countries. Only in 1969, there was racial riots but even that had been overcome by the Government, led by Umno. Outside interference was not required.

All these achievements are the result of Umno's strength as a political party. Umno leaders can perform their duties effectively because the party gives strong support which assures that the Government decisions receive the full backing of all parties in the Government and the party. Therefore, all Government staff, whether administrators, the police or army officers respect and abide by the policies and approach decided by the Government.

If there is a split in Umno and the leaders do not receive the mandate and support from the party, none from among the members of the armed forces, the police and government servants will respect the directives of the Government formed by the party.

In many countries, the credibility of the ruling organisations or individuals depend on the armed forces which are given special positions. The armed Palace Guard System, responsible for defending the leadership does not exist in Malaysia. Only the normal army and police exist which do not place individual loyalty to any leader. They are professionals and act based on the law and the authority of the administration. They will accept who ever holds the leadership of the Government as the authority.

As mentioned, if there is no credible organisation which possess the status from the legal point of view, which is strong and backed by the majority, the army, the police and public administrators will not respect and obey their orders. But as we are all aware, there is nobody who questions the right and the credibility of Umno in leading and using the power of the Government in administering the country. The rulers also give their endorsement.

We consider the role played by Umno and its leaders during the 1969 riots as normal. It may appear to be normal, but the ability of Umno leaders to act and tackle the racial riots of 1969 was actually extraordinary. In other countries, even in our country, anarchy and chaos could set in if not for the fact that Umno continued to be united and did not question the right of the leaders during the riots.

Actually unity and discipline in Umno have enabled the country to time and again overcome crises apart from administering and developing the country successfully. The existence of a coalition among political parties such as the Alliance and the Barisan Nasional also depends on unity and discipline in Umno. If there is no Umno, which is the biggest party, and there is no unity which gives position and power to the leaders, the Alliance and the Barisan Nasional would not have been formed and functioned effectively.

What I want to stress here is the fact that it is important to have a united and credible Umno. If Umno is weak, it will certainly be weak when there is disunity and the political stability and the Government which is credible and in power will not exist in the country.

Indeed it is natural that in the politics of countries which have just freed itself from colonialism, parties which succeed in redeeming the dignity of the people and independence will continue to be popular for certain period after their independence. But not too long after that, the party's popularity will fade away. There are many reasons why this happens.

Firstly, when a party struggles to achieve independence it is easy to get the people to support. But after independence the support becomes more difficult because the people expect independence to bring certain changes. It becomes even more difficult when democracy is practised, since democracy exposes the Government to threats by the people. They will not

support if their needs are not entertained. Unfortunately their needs are not always consistent with national interest, but more often based on the interest of groups or cliques. And these cliques are at loggerheads all the time.

In a multi-racial country like Malaysia, the conflict of interest among the races forces choice to be made on whether the support from one race is more beneficial than the support of other races. Whatever choice that is made, the support to the Government will decline.

Secondly, the experience of a newly independent government will be shallow and with that the expectations of the people to enjoy the fruits from the government normally do not materialise.

Thirdly, the difference of opinion and the fight for certain places among leaders in the ruling party will take place. The longer it is the higher is the ambition of the party leaders. The attempts to fight for places will break the party into factions which will clash with one another.

Finally the ruling party will split into weak groups. The party's credibility as a government will decline. This will reduce its ability to fulfil the people's expectation.

Therefore, parties which struggle for independence will be abhorred by the people and will lose support. If the party has ruled for a long time then many outside the party will be frustrated because they will not possibly get a place so they fuel the people's anger. Unfortunately the opposition party or a party that was formed by splinter group from the ruling party also do not get a strong position so there is no one party which is strong and can afford to establish a credible government. There will then be a chain of governments every time there is a general election which does not bring any change.

Because of this, the political stability and effective administration cannot be established. The country cannot be developed and the people will suffer.

Any attempt to set up a credible party which is supported by the majority of the people such as during the pre-independence struggle will fail. Without strong administration and political stability the economic and social decline will continue and the country will never become a developed country.

What I am explaining here can be seen in many countries which achieved independence after being colonised by western powers for a long time. There is virtually no administration that is credible. At times they drop democracy and form a one-party government or an iron fist administration. But these governments are exposed to the "corruption of power" and the countries' development could not be carried out.

Malaysia has to date still succeeded in maintaining a credible government. The formula created by Umno founders can still be practised. Not only Umno has successfully maintained the party structure but also the way it co-operates with other parties. But the key to all these is a credible Umno.

Therefore it becomes the responsibility of every Umno member, as well as every Malay and Bumiputera in Malaysia, to ensure that Umno continues to be strong and credible. For this we need two important factors. We need a good party structure. We need party culture which is suitable with democratic practice.

At the time when Umno was formed there was no guarantee that the president had the right to become the Prime Minister. But Umno's success in general elections in this beloved country since independence has given the opportunity to Umno's leadership to hold this post. And this has become a tradition to the extent that many are of the opinion that what is

important is to become Umno president. The post of the Prime Minister will come rolling after that.

It is true that based on tradition, the Umno president has the right to become Prime Minister of Malaysia but he will only hold the Prime Minister's post if Umno gains victory in the general election which must be held. Will Umno lead the Barisan Nasional to win the election? Will Barisan Nasional continue to accept Umno if Umno is weak ? Will Barisan Nasional get majority seats in every election?

These three questions depend on Umno's strength as a political party. Umno's unity comes from the unity of its members and the loyalty of its members to the party and the constitution and the party cannot function if it is not well structured and does not have a leader who receives full support.

Once a leader has been elected strong support must be given to him. Only this can ensure his credibility. As long as he becomes the leader he needs the support. The support and loyalty to him is not because of him as an individual or his personality. The support for him is because of the post he is holding based on the constitution and party election. If he fails to retain the trust of the party for himself then he can be dropped by the party through its constitution.

Cronyism and faction should not exist in the party. If practised, the party will slowly split and become weak.

This is because victory for any faction will cause the faction that loses to cease support. The winner will only get support from a section of the party. As a result it will become weak.

The actual democratic culture requires election to be conducted in a friendly competition manner. Election among parties as occurred during the general election is different from party elections.

In the party what needs to be given priority is the party's credibility and effectiveness. The victory by a leader will be meaningless if it causes a party to split, become weak, fail to win the general election and form a government.

Democracy in the party must ensure that the party's credibility is not threatened. For this elections must be based on the character of the candidate, his ability and other qualities as a leader. The question of support to him as an individual or a leader of a faction must not exist and influence the election.

If the election is not based on personal support or faction, then after a leader is elected, the members can close ranks. There is no animosity by the losing party towards the leaders who are elected or to his supporters. unequivocal support to the elected leader. That way the party will continue to be strong and able to tackle problems of the party, Government and the country.

The world situation when we achieved independence more than 40 years ago and now is very different. Nevertheless the danger is the same. When we formed Umno, the problems we faced were direct colonialism by outside powers. Today we are still exposed to colonialism.

After the Second World War, colonialism was considered something unacceptable by the world. Colonial powers were ashamed with their history of colonialism. They did not act as they were controlling the world anymore. They did not want to interfere in the affairs of the territories which they had liberated. They had seemingly repented and would not want to colonise anymore.

But they were not sincere. They secretly tried to weaken countries that had just been freed by trying to cause disunity among the people and the regions so that these countries could not be ruled effectively and successfully. When there is a riot and civil war, they will supply arms to

certain parties and even prepare to become agents to those involved in the fight for power.

Their intention is to cause the newly independent government to become weak and therefore use them as a tool. Although the government is iron fist they are prepared to help as long as this government supports them and gives them the opportunity to exploit the country's wealth. Indirectly the colonialism that they impose remains.

But there are countries which have achieved independence and can afford to manage and rule independently without depending on their former colonial masters.

Most of the countries which are independent and successful are East Asia countries. The economic growth of these countries and the success of their rule has become a big challenge to the former colonial powers. It seems as if these countries will really be independent and challenge the old powers in Europe and North America.

The achievements of these countries do not satisfy the former colonial powers. They want to determine that the new countries which emerged from their crutches will continue to bow to them. Although initially the world community felt that nobody had the right to interfere in their internal affairs, the western powers managed to convince the world that to control and prevent the abuse of human rights, they had the right to interfere in the domestic affairs of any country they liked.

With such claims, their propaganda machinery begin to make accusations purportedly on the existence of abuse of human rights. Such is their arrogance that they had the audacity to attack small countries directly and arrest the leaders, including a president of a country in Latin America to be brought to their country and tried under their law. That such acts are contrary to the international laws does not bother them at all.

But there are countries which still act freely. In the East, there are still many countries like this which are very progressive that they claim the 21st century is the Asian Century during which time Asia will control the world.

There is a basis to such a claim because countries in Asia are big and can command high technology and build businesses that spread worldwide. The people of Asia are very efficient and disciplined that there are no skills that they could not master.

Looking at these developments, the former western colonial powers start their recolonisation plan.

They will deny that they have plans to restrict the development of Eastern countries but we know from history that their activities in Asia and the other regions that there is a conspiracy to ensure they continue to dominate the world or at least thwart the possibility of them being challenged.

From history written by an American writer, the activities to topple leaders of newly independent countries was done in Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia and some other countries. No country will be left to be in peace and progressive except for those whose leaders can be manipulated and made their puppets.

In an unipolar world, which is controlled by one bloc only, there is no choice for any country to cross over to another bloc. Unfortunately if the country bows down to a single power, suppression will take place and the development will be curtailed. Colonialism is still alive and will continue to exist even in the information era of the new millennium.

Malaysia is not strong. We are actually weak. Malaysia is a small country with a multi-racial population. Among them are the Bumiputera, the majority of whom are Malays who are the thrust of the country.

It is very clear that to cripple and subjugate this country, the Malays must be divided and crippled. There are many ways to cripple the Malays. From the beginning the Malays had been divided through the use of religion by people with vested interest. In the name of Islam the Malays created enmity with the Malays. But thanks to the unity among the majority of the Malays in Umno, the misuse of religion by certain parties had not succeeded in crippling the Malays.

Nevertheless, the signs of disunity continue to prevail within the Malay community in Malaysia. It is only waiting for issues or opportunities to emerge from among the cracks within Umno itself.

The foreign powers are aware of this fact. They are looking for credible puppets. When they identify these puppets, they will use their weaknesses to control them. Various methods are used to ensure that these puppets follow their directions. Therefore special treatment is given to them. Certain pointers are given until the puppets and their cronies can express all their wishes. Finally they hope these puppets will take over as leaders and toe their line. Indirectly the colonialism of a nation takes place.

When the puppets they nurture for so long suddenly lose the possibility of becoming leaders of countries, the anger of foreign plotters rises beyond control, that they give open support to the attempt by their puppets to cripple the activities of the people who are the thrust of the country's administration.

This is what is happening. It can be clearly seen that attempts to colonise the country has already been made. This time it failed. But there is no guarantee that such attempts will not be made again.

Nevertheless, the key to determine whether the attempts by the foreign powers to colonise this beloved country again will succeed or not is still in the hands of Umno members. As long as Umno is solid and strong, as long as the unity in Umno is not shattered, the attempts by foreign powers to cripple and recolonise the country will fail.

Umno is not just a party. Umno is the thrust and foundation to the party which rules the country, that is the BN. If Umno is weak, BN is weak; if BN is weak, the Malaysian Government is weak and if the Malaysian Government is weak, Malaysia will fall under colonialism.

Democracy is the best political system ever created by man. But like other man's creations, democracy has its weaknesses. Whether democracy is good or bad does not depend on the system or constitution or regulations. It depends on those practising it. If those adopting the democratic system are efficient and know the limitations of democracy, know the deficiency, the practice of democracy will bring about good results. On the contrary, if those practising democracy are only preoccupied with the freedom given and ignore the dangers of this freedom, then democracy will ruin its practitioners to the extent they cannot possibly be revived.

Amendments to be presented for consideration at this special assembly are meant to protect the party from falling prey to possible misuse of democratic freedom. It is hoped these amendments will prevent the possibility of actions, including in the election of party leaders, causing the party to split or become weak.

These amendments have been checked thoroughly and the delegates at this assembly will certainly go through them carefully. There may be amendments proposed to the amendments presented. We may amend some amendments or approve some amendments. But believe me, the constitution will not guarantee the credibility or permanence of the party. What can guarantee the credibility and the permanence of the party is the understanding and wisdom of party members in using the amendments to the constitution. If we all can bring about the culture which gives priority to party interests

and its objectives then the amendments that we will pass will become effective.

The culture referred to is one which gives priority to party struggle and not the interest of certain candidates. Maybe some feel that their respective candidates are too good that their failure spells failure of the party. Maybe they are right. But if in the process of ensuring success for the candidates, the party interest is sacrificed, then the obsession to the candidates will not bring any benefit. What is important is that we should not be overzealous in our efforts to ensure the victory of our candidates and if they fail, we should be prepared to accept the candidates elected by the majority.

After an election is over we must close our ranks, leaving no room for our foes to penetrate. Whatever tension that prevails during the elections should be forgotten and attention given for the achievement of party objectives. Remember in politics there are no permanent friends and no permanent enemies. There is no certainty that we are going to support the same candidates in future elections. We have a proverb which says "sekali air bah, sekali pantai berubah" (the shore will change according to the tide).

The party is important. Individuals are not important. Individuals come and go, but the party will last for a long time. The struggle does not end just because individuals fail. But the struggle will come to an end if the party is destroyed.