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Another masterly performance of plain talking minus the rhetorics

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IT WAS yet another masterly performance by the Umno President. Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's speech at yesterday's opening of the party's annual general assembly was the most frank and open to date. True to form, the speech pulled no punches, offered no excuses - just plain talking and straight shooting.

It was a speech that has much significance for himself, the party, the Government and everything they collectively stood for. The much-maligned Prime Minister in recent months spoke from the heart as he rebutted issues which sought to undermine his credibility, and the Government he leads.

Dr Mahathir has made countless speeches before, whether at the party assembly or elsewhere. But one could see that this speech was important because it was intended to set the record straight, to put the contentious issues in their proper perspectives.

It was also aimed at quelling whatever remaining doubts fence sitters within the party have, of issues which affected the party and the country, before this week's gathering. No one could have done it better as it was articulated with logic, a hallmark of a communicator whose message is easily understood.

In a speech which is perhaps the longest he had made thus far at an assembly opening - one hour and 40 minutes - Dr Mahathir should be excused for sounding more personal than before. It was not a speech aimed at seeking vindication - just one to state the facts as he saw it, giving the historical perspectives along the way.

Not one to take personal credit for all the achievements his administration and leadership had brought, Dr Mahathir was compelled to be more personal because some of the allegations by his critics and detractors were very personal in nature.

Many also said the speech was that of a fighter, a warrior whose pride had been wounded, whose credibility had been questioned and whose patience had been severely tested. It wasn't emotional, though it could easily have been so had he wanted it to be.

Thursday's Youth and Wanita assemblies steered clear of the Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim issue, but Dr Mahathir dwelt at length on it. He took pains to rebut allegations that Anwar's downfall was due to a political conspiracy at the highest level. It was only Dr Mahathir's own admission of naivety - and perhaps affection for a rakan seperjuangan (comrade-in-arms) - that clouded his vision for so long.

Did his explanation go down well? Did it satisfy the Umno rank and file? It was thought so, believers said. But then - there's none more blind than those who refuse to see; and none more deaf than those who refuse to hear.

There was an air of expectancy when Dr Mahathir took to the rostrum to begin his speech. This was mostly due his remarks a few days ago that there would be a "surprise" in his address, which has triggered numerous speculations.

Even if there was no "surprise" announcement, delegates and observers alike have plenty to mull as food for thought.

But talking straight, and in a frank manner has always been the trademark of this Umno doctor. He did it again, minus the empty rhetorics and dramatics.

Then again, Dr Mahathir is not one to waste his time and that of others on empty rhetorics.

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