

15/05/2000

`Criticism by delegates to improve party'

PERMANENT CHAIRMAN, members of the supreme council, old and new, delegates and those present. Let me begin my speech to thank the permanent chairman as people told me that I always forget at the end of my speech to thank you.

In this hall, the permanent chairman is the only person who is older than I am. He has promised he will not contest in three years' time. If I remember correctly, he had promised the same thing before, but we have to forgive him because he is old like me... always forgetful.

I also want to thank the acting permanent chairman who has carried out his duties well.

I would also like to thank the many people who are not in this hall to whom I am indebted and all of you too. It was they who decided to nominate only one person to contest the posts of the president and that of the deputy president. Due to this, both posts did not have to go through a contest. They have also done the same for the post of the permanent chairman... no contest.

We thank these divisional delegates. On behalf of the delegates, I also thank them for selecting the G-7 who were elected at the divisional delegates' meetings. Thank you to the seven, thank you to the divisional conferences which elected them.

I also want to tell you that there were those who told me they were elected based on the Kubang Pasu divisional election. It is not true. It is just a coincidence. Those elected by the Kubang Pasu division (of which Dr Mahathir is the head) did not necessarily be the people I selected. I elected different people.

But still there were delegates who still believed the Kubang Pasu division made the choice on my order. It is not true. I did not give any order. But they had made the decision themselves. Alhamdulillah (Thanks to Allah), the Kubang Pasu's choice looked good and was agreed on by the delegates who elected the team initially elected by Kubang Pasu.

I'd like to thank on behalf of the Kubang Pasu division. The choice was not done on my behalf because those of my choice were not elected. Those who had been elected should not be angry with me for saying this.

I would like to thank the speakers from the various States who had made meaningful speeches. They gave all sorts of suggestions which I had listened attentively and will bear in mind. I like to thank the many speakers who were careful in arranging their sentences in such a way that while they wanted to remind the president, they had make it sound as if they were saying it to others.

Many up here had been criticised and I know they were also referring to me and for that, I like to thank them. I do not harbour anger or feel dissappointed if the criticisms were made against me because I am here only because of Umno. It is Umno which has chosen me. It is Umno which has given me a place in the Government. It is impossible for me to become the Prime Minister if Umno did not choose the president.

That is why I feel so indebted and if Umno feels it has to criticise me, that is its right as the president belongs to Umno. If I choose to be with Umno and be the president, I have no right because I went for the post.

Nobody has placed it on my shoulders, but I went for it myself and if others criticised or were angry then it is like saying "It goes with the territory" ... anyone holding this post will be criticised and this

criticism is not worthless.

Naturally, this criticism is good because I am confident the speakers who made the criticisms had good intentions to improve our party. I have heard criticisms and I could reply them one by one but we all know it is very important for party leaders to go on the ground to meet not only the ordinary members but also others.

Actually this has been done; we had tried to go down to the ground to meet Umno branches and division members. It was only that I did not do it enough for some years in the past because I had planned to retire as the president and Prime Minister.

I preferred to see my deputy to work hard, to go down to meet Umno members and Umno division and to invite them to his office and foster relationships with Umno members because I was of the opinion that as the person who would take over my post it would be better he became more popular with Umno.

That was my stand and that was why I was not so close or made efforts to get closer to Umno members, branches, divisions and Umno liaison committees. Seldom had I made visits to the States.

On the contrary, I was preoccupied with my duties as Prime Minister as though the position was not inter-related with the party president. This was done deliberately to show that a person who was taking over the post of Prime Minister and that of the post of president would be the person accepted well by Umno, in particular and by the people as a whole.

But like we all know, what I hoped would happen did not materialise because of reasons which I need not explain as it is not so popular to do so.

Unfortunately, what I planned did not materialise and therefore I had to make efforts to revive Umno's struggle which, following certain incidents, had lost confidence among some Umno members.

I made some attempts to be closer with Umno members and with Umno divisions, but when we held the general election in 1999 it was clear the support to Umno had declined.

We did not lose, but won satisfactorily, if seen from the Barisan Nasional point of view. We only needed to win two-thirds, but obtained three-quarters... Far better from what was anticipated.

Umno lost many votes. We returned to form the Government and carry out the duties, but after the general election in 1999, the supreme council decided to carry out more activities in the party than in the Government.

That is why, this time, we no longer hold the supreme council meeting once a month but twice each month so that party matters can be scrutinised and we also want to know what the various bureaus in the party are doing.

There are those who pointed out that the bureaus are just bureaus only. Many of them seemed like blue pens rather than bureaus. That is why we hold the council meetings twice each month and each time we meet, the first meeting will discuss in general and at great length the situation in the party and in the country.

The first meeting discusses in general and in great length the situation in the party and country and the second meeting centres on reports from the various bureaus.

And now, we know what is happening in the party and in the country and we can take steps to overcome the efforts by the Opposition who are always out to weaken us.

I also welcome the suggestion that the supreme council meeting be held in the States. Actually, this suggestion was made when I met the respective State liaison committees. I met each one of them and they said a lot and even three hours were not enough.

And among the suggestions was for the council meeting to be held in the

States in the morning, meet the liaison committees and carry out whatever events. In the evening, we hold the council meeting and this can foster closer relationship between the supreme council and the States and Umno at the State level.

And this will be carried out, but we need to wait until we can hold this meeting and set up the new supreme council line-up. Believe me, we will try to bring closer the new supreme council by holding the meetings in the States. But, I find the duties in the Government, at least for me, will increase and there will be more.

We have become popular and many leaders of foreign countries wished to make official visits to Malaysia and they needed to be attended to by me if they are at the Prime Minister or President level. There are also many invitations for meetings abroad which are difficult to turn down and at the same time, matters in the office are increasing.

Applications for this and that are always received and cannot be discarded into the rubbish bins. On the other hand, I have to become a postman so that the applications can be sent to the relevant departments.

Since there is too much work at the Prime Minister's Department and it interrupts my attention on party matters, I wish to inform that I will transfer more work at the Prime Minister's level to the ministers and the Deputy Prime Minister.

That way, I will have more free time to focus on party matters and to meet more party leaders and visit the States to listen to their problems. This way is also good because I need to give more opportunity to the deputy president for him to get to know closer the tasks which he will bear when he becomes the Prime Minister.

Actually, I had planned to retire in 1998 after the Commonwealth Games, but was forced to retain the post. I hope nothing will happen to my deputies. Give your full confidence to my deputy so that he can hold the Prime Minister's post when I retire.

But, I have not decided when I will retire. Normally, I will keep it a secret since there are calls for me to be the Prime Minister for three, four more terms, that is 25 years, and that there are those who asked until when ... (to retire)?

There are some who said too old, and gone senile. But, when the permanent chairman, who is 80, can still conduct this meeting, which is difficult, I think I can also still do it. But, I think it won't be that long. But, don't at this moment, make any calls and ask, when next... until it comes to the stage of boeing when I go up the stage.

But, I don't intend to tongkat langit (a Malay saying which literally means to be around until the end of the world). I will have to go. Even if I don't want to go, God will still send me to another place. And I will have to let go and the people will have to accept my replacement.

What is all these? To me, there will be no end to Umno's struggles, and whether as a president or not, it is my responsibility to support this party and whoever becomes its leader.

Even if you do not agree with me, I will keep quiet. It's already enough 19 years as president, give a chance to others.

Ladies and gentlemen, there are many suggestions and opinions that require consideration. A lot have been said on the need for the party to control the Government.

And this is not something new that has been said during this meeting. During every meeting, the need for the party to control the Government is always mentioned. But, there are no changes. I don't know if we need different people to be the Prime Minister and the president. If so, we need to know what are the duties of the Prime Minister. Is it necessary to decide that he is a president without powers? And then, when there is any

meeting, we will have to decide who is first and who is next. We need to think of all these.

As such, we need to study if it is possible or not. If possible, at the Federal level, at the State level, there will be different people as the liaison committee chairman and a different person will be the Menteri Besar and to decide on their positions. Who will get the priority and what is the protocol? Is it that the liaison committee chairmen will have more rights to decide on the candidates and propose them to the president who is not the Prime Minister?

If he makes a certain decision, will he not choose his friends or siblings? No more the siblings of the Mentri Besar, but those of the liaison committee chairmen. But, after the State liaison committee chairmen, the division chairmen next.

Let it not be that the chairman of the division is also the wakil rakyat (elected representative) in the area. That the two be separated and that the the wakil rakyat no longer becomes the division chairman and cannot make suggestions but division chairman can do so.

I hope the division chairman which makes the decision does not practise favouritism or gives himself priority because if he picks himself as a candidate, he cannot be the liaison committee chairman. That is his right.

We will study the reasons, and the reasons have often been asked, it has been too often we are asked on the party controlling the Government. But now, I wish to confess that I follow the party's demand and sometimes, the party does not agree with my suggestion, I have to drop the suggestion. It seems to a certain extent the party controlled the Government, but it is still unsatisfactory.

On the problems with teachers, officers of government agencies, government officers and others found opposing the Government and opposing our party.

There are those who said we do not need find too many enemies. If too many, there will be problems. If we send all our enemies to Sabah as the Abu Sayyaf team. Today, it is so good, since Sabah gave 17 seats (parliamentary seats) to us.

If we send the teachers to Sabah, we may not get 17 seats since those punished will not keep quiet when they feel they have been victimised. People are like that. If a person likes a certain thing, he will remember and ponder on that thing only. If annoyed, he can be hardworking and work 24 hours a day. If sent to Sabah, he would come back and even campaign in Kelantan.

That is why, in Kelantan we got fewer votes because the people from Kelantan who live in Kuala Lumpur returned to Kelantan in large numbers. It is not wrong we give a holiday on polling day, actually we gave it because they claimed they wanted to give us the votes.

It is not wrong we give a holiday on polling day. Actually, we were asked so that these people can go back and cast their votes. But, when we gave the holiday, they returned not to vote for us but opposed us. Next time, we will not give a holiday anymore.

I think we should not make enemies with them. They do not understand Umno's struggles or certain incidents.

If they understood Umno and what our struggles are, I think they will join us and give their support.

Recently, I met with many government officers. Many of these officers are believed to oppose the Government. I met with more than 400 senior government officers and explained to them what is actually happening in the country.

I cannot tell if they will support us in 2004. But, is is clear after we explained, their attitude changed. In fact, they were very good although

some officers said they were not happy with this Prime Minister because he is not officer-friendly.

One reason given on the claim that I was not good with the officers was that their request for a five-day week instead of the current six-day week was rejected by me on numerous occasions. That showed I was not good with the government officers but I am good towards my country.

Ours is a developing nation and we need to work harder than a developed nation. That is why we cannot work for only five days in a week, we need to work six days, need to work harder and I never asked someone to do something that I do not like to do. I work seven days a week, no problems.

On Sundays, there are always events lined up for me and visits that I must make. We do not feel tired if we do the things we like.

We feel tired, lethargic and only want to sleep if we have to do things we do not like. And I like to do things for the Government and party; don't feel tired at all. Anyway, we give a five-day week now, twice each month. That shows we are friendly with government officers.

They also claimed we do not consider the requests of government officers. I pleaded with Tun Daim (Zainuddin) to give 10 per cent increase in salaries. Nobody asked, but we gave anyway. Still, they say we are not friendly.

But, we will strive to be closer with these officers so that we can better explain what is Umno, its struggles, and what are the incidents that aroused their anger towards us so that they know the truth.

That way, they can make a fairer judgement. If we listen to one side only, we will find the things they tell us are never wrong.

But, if we listen to others too, we find they too are not in the wrong. Both sides are not wrong. How can something evolve if both sides are not wrong?

But, if we can make a good assessment, then we can decide who is right, who is wrong.

I have also met with the government agencies. I met with top officials from the government agencies and explained. I stood for three hours to explain and accepted their questions and answered them.

And then, there were agencies which gave me a standing ovation. They stood up and clapped for the explanation given and I am confident their hostility towards the Government has somewhat reduced.

We cannot alienate ourselves from those whom we think do not support us or disagree with us. We need to know if they support us or not and if they understand their stand. If they do not understand, then it is our responsibility to explain the real situation. Hopefully with the explanation given, they will accept them and will stop opposing us.

We must tell them the truth, don't lie when explaining to anyone because they will know later. That is why, I ask you not to demand for the Government to punish all these errant quarters, including teachers. To transfer teachers far away from their families because they opposed us, and when they are employed during an election, they will do something that will not be good for our party.

So, before any action is taken, we must know if the allegations against them are true and why they opposed us since they were once our supporters.

What are we going to do to Umno members who opposed us? Are we going to dismiss them, if one or two, maybe it is fine but each time 100, 200, 1,000, 2,000 we expel them and each time there is a complaint, then the management committee will suggest to the supreme council to dismiss them.

In the end, Umno will become very small and when many among those dismissed get angry, they will work at making Umno fail and it will be difficult for us to win in the election. That is why we need to correct them. It is not difficult to do so, because we are in the right.

Not all attending any Umno functions think our struggles are right. I do not know if there are any of you in this hall who still doubt Umno's struggles. But, we don't want to expel (them), we want to expose them to the truth. God willing, we hope they will return to become strong supporters for our party.

That is why I hope that we do not have to be too rough with the civil servants because sometimes we unintentionally acted roughly against those who don't do anything on us. Maybe only a few from the Government and its agencies who demonstrated the kind of attitude which is against our wishes.

We will rehabilitate them, put them on the right track, so that they will realise Umno's contributions towards them and how they have benefited from Umno's struggle.

It is impossible for them to hold positions, it is impossible for them to get education and it is impossible for the agencies where they work to exist without Umno.

It is Umno which creates these agencies, and train them, give them scholarships until they graduated and work in these agencies, drawing high salaries, way above what the Prime Minister is earning. We do not envy them, but if they are angry at us due to the lack of understanding, then it is our responsibility to explain to them, inform them and (for us to) get closer to them.

God willing, if not all or we cannot get 100 per cent, a portion of them will return to Umno's folds and support the noble struggle of Umno because Umno has done a lot for them, and for all Malays.

Ladies and gentlemen, there are some who have raised the ban on campaigning. I am not refuting the allegation but just to give a clarification. And those who have talked about it know or do not know what I am saying.

Actually, after our dismal performance in the 1999 general election, many have criticised Umno. And many are saying that Umno does not concentrate (on efforts) to rehabilitate the party so that Umno can be accepted and supported by all.

Instead, there are Umno members who are obsessed with fighting for places in Umno. For this reason, I invited candidates vying for vice-president, Wanita Umno chief, deputy Wanita Umno chief as well as candidates contesting for Umno Youth deputy chief to my residence. I invited them and I explained to them on the current position of the Malays, divided and weak.

I explained to them the history of other races, other countries, other civilisations which climbed to the peak only to fail later due to the action of their leaders. I asked them to be careful and wary of this so that it would not happen in our party because there is still a long way in our struggle.

After a lengthy talk on this subject, the candidates for vice-presidents, Wanita chief, deputy Wanita chief and deputy Youth chief posts made a decision to bring their campaign to a halt. I did not ask them to stop their campaign. They made the decision to stop campaigning independently.

Not satisfied with that, they insisted on coming up with a pledge letter on that night itself. I did not stop them. You would have expected me to say, "Continue campaigning, don't stop." But they made a pledge not to have any abuse of money in their campaign. They did not enjoy campaigning anymore and they wanted to stop.

Futhermore, they have been campaigning long before the 1999 general election to become vice-presidents and supreme council members. It was only two weeks to go (before Umno election), but the impact was still

there. But if they wanted to stop campaigning, I did not say that they should not stop. They pledged they wanted to stop.

After that, I called up the candidates vying for supreme council seats. These candidates were under the impression that if the candidates for vice-presidents had stopped their campaign, it was definitely the president who had asked them to stop campaigning.

Again, I explain the problems besetting the Malays and Umno. After I opened it to the floor, they gave their views. And many were of the opinion that they should not stop with their campaign because some of them were not familiar faces. So, they would be losing out compared to those who were well-known.

But we saw that those who were well-known were not selected in the party's election. So, it is not a question of being well-known or not. I feel those who did not make it this time despite embarking on a campaign, may win the next time as people would have already known them.

If they were not chosen for the next election, there would always be another time. If you were not elected this time, it does not mean that is the end of the world.

There is still a lot of time, but there also good suggestions. They want their photographs, names and their numbers to be printed so delegates can see how smart they look. And this we did, we accepted. The next day, I telephoned Datuk Khalil (Yaakob), and asked him to come up with this as soon as possible. But he told me, the candidates' numbers were not ready.

Never mind. Wait. We will eventually get the numbers. This is why you people get a complete set, photographs with candidates' numbers, making it easy to make your pick. I made my selection at home. I noted down the candidates' numbers, and when I came here, it was not difficult (to pick which one). I just followed their numbers.

Some people have to look through first, to see if they are smart looking or not, and this delays things. That is why the duration to get the result for the supreme council election, vice-presidents and others is about the same with the time taken for the results in the elections of several Umno Youth and Wanita leaders. We have managed to work fast due to a suggestion from the candidates themselves.

I thank the candidates for their suggestions. And they did not make a pledge to stop campaigning without saying anything. And they stopped campaigning straightaway. When they wanted to be featured in newspapers, place congratulatory messages, I did not say anything.

Campaign, no prohibition. Whoever said that I was the one who stopped this, was not in the right. If you insist on it, let it be. I don't mind. I have to accept it. But I did not ask them, the decision was theirs. And I am grateful because none of them who were present at my residence that night had voiced against accepting votes through corrupt means. All of them rejected this.

None of them said it was true that we are the ones who distribute money packets to G5 and G7 and the other delegates. None. All rejected corrupt practices. Alhamdulillah.

As far as campaigning is concerned, they did not want to stop it. And I do not impose any restriction. Who said that I stopped them? Making speeches to prohibit campaigns, I did not do. If they wanted to campaign, they could go ahead. This is their decision. All of us are democratic. If we want to go to the extent of ruining the party, it can be done but we do not do it.

Observe the ethics when campaigning. After that day, for delegates who were already in Kuala Lumpur, I just reminded them that this meeting would only be held on May 11. There is really no reason to be in Kuala Lumpur, spending a lot on hotel bills. Return to your villages first.

Alhamdulillah, they did not defy this. They returned home. And hotel managers were complaining to me for asking these people to go home, resulting in empty rooms although they had been booked until the general assembly. Never mind because as a result of efforts by Kadir (Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister Datuk Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir), hotels have recorded full occupancy. Everybody is praising him. Very good.

Our Government is hardworking, doing a lot of things for the people, for the bumiputera, for the Malays. But each time we embark on a welfare programme, we do not get the kind of returns that we expect. For instance, if in the past not many Malays received scholarships, studied overseas, went to universities, now tens of thousands have the opportunity to go to universities.

When we do this kind of charity which is a form of religious obligation, we believe the beneficiaries will surely feel indebted and grateful to us, and will support us. But we ignore them. Others approach and influence them until they strongly oppose us.

This has become too frequent. We set up government agencies, establish large government businesses, and promote officers and managers among the Malays. We hope they will be grateful to us but they are not.

And we get angry with them. But the reason is that we do not do any follow-ups. We do not try to get closer to them after doing all these things.

As far as students are concerned, I admit I am the guilty one because I prohibit people from influencing, getting closer to them or providing them with political information.

And Umno as a law-abiding political party, does not disturb the students. On the other hand, the Opposition does not heed the policy, does not care whether the students can study or not. They go to universities and instigate the students to oppose us. And when they have graduated and worked in government agencies, they strongly oppose the Government.

Our mistake is that we do not continue with our efforts. After sending them to universities, giving them education and job placements, we believe that they will support us. This is the reason why we do not approach them and explain to them what is Umno and what its struggle is about. They are exposed to the Opposition parties and go against the Government.

The same goes for mosques. There are many mosques in the country. During my visits to villages, one of the villagers' first demands is a new mosque, or the existing one to be expanded. They want this and that. And we think of fulfilling religious obligations; we allocate a lot for mosques. But who are using these mosques? It is Pas which is using it. We build the mosques and they are using them. Just like when we send people to universities, they conveniently reap the benefits.

And why is this happening? Because we do not use the mosques.

The Sabah representative has raised this point. We want mosques to be administered by committees comprising Umno members. But whenever there is a meeting to pick mosque committees, we were absent. Instead, the other group attends the meeting. They go in busloads, but when these people are picked to sit on the committees, we get angry.

Then we say: "The Government should appoint mosque committees. We have a Government. Ask the Government to do it. We do not have to do it."

I think we have to do it ourselves. We have to go there not only to become kariah committee members, but must run all that is necessary for the mosques. Let us not close down the mosque once we have become committee members.

We do not let people in, do not allow Pas to hold lectures, do not allow the kuliah subuh. Actually, we need to hold activities in the mosques.

On our own, we can invite lecturers, those who are well-experienced t

present the true teachings of Islam. If we do not do this, others will and they have no intention at all to conduct Islamic teachings but to spread the influence of their political parties. And we get upset.

Whenever I met them, they told me Pas members did this and that at the mosques and that it is no good. But, what do we do?

Don't tell me Dr Mahathir has to give lectures at all the mosques. I can do so on religion, although Pas do not recognise my abilities.

Among those who speak for Pas are also rogues. But all are called ulama. Even if they boo me 100 times, I am still at where I am now.

Before becoming a Minister, I was often invited to the universities and I was on the side of the Government and supporting Umno and was booed at by the students.

When heckled at, I just smiled and waited for as long as necessary until they were tired to do so and they would stop. When they stopped, I would start to speak.

Don't be afraid to be heckled at. Go, don't be afraid, we don't die from being heckled at.

Ladies and gentlemen, we must carry on with Umno's responsibilities, we must not always say it is the Government which must formulate the laws, the Government which makes the rules that certain officers should be transferred.

Ladies and gentlemen, after the general election I had invited several Umno members and Umno leaders to explain to them that the situation had changed and there could be more changes.

It is common for us in Umno to be assisted by certain people, certain officers, the Government and its agencies. We need not have to talk about it. When we want to explain about religion, we set up Jakim. Jakim will speak and we all sit quietly.

When we want to do something we must have a licence and there are instances where (we want) the ministers to issue licences for us. It is easy for us if the person whom the directive was given accepts the directive. But think of a situation where the person refuses to adhere to the directive.

This is the change that we are able to see. People whom we used to direct and follow the directive are now not adhering to our directive. This is the world that we have to face, a new politics for Umno where we can no longer ask people and hope they will carry out the task for us.

Today, we do not give directives to other people. We do it ourselves and regard there are no government agencies or bodies, including newspapers that are supporting us.

This is the same situation which the Opposition parties used to face previously. Opposition parties in the past could depend on the Government, they had to do everything themselves and today we see they had achieved some success.

We have to think that we are living in a hostile society where the community does not support us. How are we going to fight for Umno's struggles and succeed? We cannot depend on other people, only on our own strengths.

That was why I summoned these Umno leaders to explain the new scenario where we no longer can depend on the Government and government officers, including government religious officers.

We must realise that we can no longer depend on them; we also cannot bank our hopes on our youths as they are no longer supporting us and we cannot depend on reporters and their newspapers as they are against us.

Amid this scenario, how are we going to champion our party's struggles? We are pressured from outside, how are we going to achieve success for our party?

Previously, it was easy for us to ask others to do things for us but now these people do not want to do that for us. What then can we do to achieve success for our party?

To achieve success for our party, the first step to take when we are attacked from outside, like in 1946, is we close ranks and face the challenges.

We saw how the Malays were in the years between 1945 and 1946; they are much weaker than we are today because they were not educated; not many among them were professionals, no wealthy corporate figures and no people in special positions and certain posts.

Umno which was set up then was weak but by closing ranks and uniting, they defeated the British.

Ladies and gentlemen, if I make a call for us to close ranks, we must not emphasise on petty matters because we are now living in a hostile environment. The situation around us is not like it used to be.

We cannot depend on other people, we must fight our struggles on our own and we are capable of championing our own fate as though we had become an opposition party which no longer controls the Government.

Look at the people of Terengganu and Kelantan. Can they come forward and say, "The Government... please take action against so and so". The Government will not do that because it is Pas-led. Think (what will happen) if this happens throughout the country. If we do not unite, we will fail to achieve our objectives.

Ladies and gentlemen, I appeal for us to unite and if there are things which we are not satisfied with, then make it known among us. We discuss, we adjust and we solve our problems at round-table discussions.

Ladies and gentlemen, there are people who said to me that my speech this time was very interesting because I read the doa at the end of it.

Maybe there are those who have the opinion that I read the doa to show how Islamic I am. I was not showing off because this is against our religion.

Ladies and gentlemen, I felt desperate. I had coaxed and cried here but it came to nothing.

There were so many things I had done to unite Umno, to remind Umno that we are fighting for our race and country. But the results are not what I expected and that was why of late, I prayed to Almighty Allah to open our eyes, hearts and ears and understand the dangers we are now facing. And when I said that we might be re-colonised, it was not meant to frighten anyone because this is true.

We could be re-colonised, we see a country where its Government was toppled and the leader chosen by foreigners.

They are not independent anymore, they are not free to criticise the West. We are free and we can say what we like.

Ladies and gentlemen, they have tried to topple this Government, the Government which is led by Umno.

They have tried to topple the Government by giving their support to Opposition parties by encouraging negative activities in this hall. I was sitting there, at a dinner where (US Vice-President) Al Gore took to the stage and delivered a speech encouraging demonstrations in Malaysia by calling the demonstrators brave.

This is Al Gore talking in this respected Dewan Merdeka and in our country as though he is a colonial master who can dictate our fate.

Ladies and gentlemen, when they devalue our currency, it is not business but a political move to make us poor so that we seek help from them.

When we seek their assistance, they will impose conditions, that is, we allow them to manage our economy like what they did to our countries around us. This was why they devalue our currency, but thank God, we do

not bow to them.

Ladies and gentlemen, the economic downturn however had not affected the Malays much. There are Malays who are happy if the situation persisted, and who are they?

They are not those who grow oil palm. Previously when they sell oil palm for US\$1, they will get RM2.50 but now they get RM3.80 for US\$1.

They are getting more money and that was why they did not feel pressure; those who are affected are corporate bodies which are burdened with huge loans and are forced to sell.

It is fortunate that we did not sell to Singtel. Talking about Singtel, we do not like its name because it "sing and tell".

If we do not have economic strength, we will become like our neighbours where foreigners would come and ask us whether we had restructured our banks. Ask Bank Negara where it had done this and that; there must not be discrimination in our business and we must allow foreigners to buy what we have.

And when we are indebted to them, this "chettiar" will ask us to pay. If we can run away, we will, but if we cannot, we will have to pay with whatever we have.

We will have to accept but Alhamdulillah, we are thankful although the Malays were not badly affected, the Chinese were and that was why in the 1999 general election, they gave their full support to us.

Karpal Singh and Kit Siang, who were like their gods, were rejected. If we had not imposed the currency controls and did not manage our finances properly, they would have nearly become bankrupt. We were able to show we handle things our own way which are against the world.

We are against America, IMF and the World Bank and it is clear that our ways were effective and our businessmen who are now in better financial positions are making profits.

Read in the newspapers, Malayan Banking netted RM1 billion profit within nine months. There are more companies making profits because of the actions taken by the Umno-led Government.

In those days, the Malays did not know about financial problems because they did not know how to do business. They could open roadside stalls but to handle the country's finance, they did not know.

But today, other races who used to criticise us and economic experts are forced to admit that the Malaysian ways are good and they are willing to pay 10 per cent more..

So ladies and gentlemen, we must have confidence in our capabilities. If we want to make Proton Saga, we can, if we want to make Proton Wira, we can, too; all these previously we were not able to.

Things which we could not do in the past we can do now, Malaysia Boleh, Umno Boleh and Bumputera Boleh... So can Umno fight Pas in 2004? If we have the confidence, we can.

We must close ranks and face the challenges, Insya-Allah. (Applause.) Thank you, but I am not finished yet. There are a few more things I want to touch on. I see among those standing and clapping and giving me courage are women.

Women have done a lot for us. Whenever there is an election we depend on them to canvass for votes.

They go from house to house dutifully though they know it is the house of enemies; sometimes without being invited. They swallow their pride for the party.

The contribution of women to the party is very substantial, the contribution to our country is also very big. In any society about 50 per cent are women and 50 per cent men. The total population of Malays and bumiputeras in Malaysia is 14 million, meaning seven million are male and

seven million are female. If we separate them, than the strength of 14 million will only be seven million and we will become weak.

We want women to be with us to join us in the struggle for the race. They can contribute a lot to our struggle by canvassing for votes but they also have high knowledge, high qualification and many of them had shown their capability to the extent of becoming our representatives in atomic energy, having being represented by Mazlan - the name maybe a man's but Mazlan is a woman. We must remember that the woman's name of Zaitun could also apply to a man.

There are so many more examples of successful women in Malaysia. They are capable of becoming fighter-jet pilots, engineers, Putrajaya building managers. The chief engineer of Putrajaya is a woman.

But, we might not be strong without the women and they are not asking much, and there are not many of them in this hall. That too because of the condition that only Wanita heads become delegates. Not many, and they are not asking much and we have to respond.

I am saying this because I am afraid to return home... what should I tell my wife? My wife is a woman. Do not think (wife must be a woman) this is normal. In Europe and America people can marry a man as a wife and a woman can have a woman as a husband.

So now when I say I married a woman, that is not something natural. If you want to follow them, all of you know everything's possible ... front, back, left, right and everything's possible.

We are grateful that Dr Zaharah (National Unity and Social Development Minister Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman) who had lost wants to see women united and continue to struggle for Umno. She is not here, I am sorry. Send my regards to her.

In the past when there were changes in the leadership we accepted and this time there is a change, and we accept it although there were some who made affectionate boos. The boo is not the sign of anger. Umno members, when they boo, show their love.

There was also advice given by the speakers including Badruddin Amiruldin, and I believe the Wanita head will accept the advice.

Ladies and gentlemen, party leaders, loyalty to the party is very important, I am loyal to the party and you too are loyal to the party. We have to be loyal to the leaders but loyalty to the leaders has its limits, not loyalty until death.

We are loyal to the leaders when they are doing good. If you have to be loyal to me as a president, you will only have to be loyal at certain times when I am good.

If I am not doing good things, do not show your loyalty to me. If I call someone to the office and I say they are stupid, do not be loyal to me. That is not the way of a leader. A leader places importance on its party and not unto himself.

Ladies and gentlemen, there are many on this stage who were not loyal to me before. They have challenged me. They tried to put me down, but all that is history. After that, we became good friends and forgot the past. Pak Lah was in Team B, today he is the Deputy President and Deputy Prime Minister.

I do not keep in heart. At that time, he might have been influenced by something, but his loyalty to the party was always there, and I gave him position as I was confident he was not championing his own cause. He could only be a party leader to carry out all duties and responsibilities for the party's success.

Because of that, he is loyal. One day he will lead this party, God-willing. We cannot say anything for sure as God decides. We can only plan and sent to the Economic Planning Unit.

Plan properly. But, if God decides against it, then it would not materialise. Even if we have everything - money, planning - if God decides against it, it would not happen, "No". We do not know how God will say it, He can say it in English. He would not say it in Arab, because we will not be able to understand.

God can say things that we least expect. He said "Kun Fa Ya Kun". It will be done. That is why I became Prime Minister without least expecting it.

When I was young and when I grew up and joined Umno, I never imagined becoming Prime Minister. After the late Tun Razak, it was the late Tun Ismail. But what to do, it is God's will.

That is why we have to humble ourselves. We should not be too proud and haughty. Ladies and gentlemen, as party president and Prime Minister, I think of myself as a slave to the party, and all party members can criticise me. I accept criticism. If I have made mistakes, I will consider the criticism. It may be true, it may not be true or it may be half-true. Sometimes, their suggestions are not always right, as a leader I have to consider them, too. If it is not true, you should say politely, "Doctor, that is not true."

Do not say, "You are stupid" like how the Caucasians call us; we are stupid because we do not know how to manage our money. We are not stupid. Nobody is stupid. They are only ignorant. If they know, they will do something else.

Therefore, we have to keep in mind that we all belong to this party and we struggle for the party, not for position. Our struggle must be for the party, religion and our race. For the development of our race, religion and our party.

Because of that we must be loyal to the party and to the person chosen to lead the party. But loyalty to the party differs a little bit from loyalty to a leader. When we find a leader straying away, the leader is of low morals, we must not support such a leader.

At that time, think back to the party and turn our loyalty to the party. God willing, we will be successful in our struggle for the party.

This is, ladies and gentlemen, the hope of our party, my hope and hope of the Supreme Council members who were just elected and I believe that it is also your hope as representatives and hope of all Umno members.

Let their hopes be in accordance with our party, with objectives and loyalty focused on the party and loyalty limited to leaders when they carry out the duties of our party. I believe, we will all achieve success, God willing. And this is all that I have to say this evening.

Thank you.

(END)