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Let's go back to our ideals (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today called on Umno members to return to the ideals upon which the party was founded 54 years ago, adding that this was vital for its strength and survival.

Addressing the 54th general assembly at the Putra World Trade Centre, the party president said Umno made no promises nor was it the objective of its struggle to make anybody powerful or wealthy.

Since today is Umno's 54th birthday, Dr Mahathir's plea is even more appropriate. This was not lost on delegates, members and observers at the packed Dewan Merdeka.

"If anyone becomes a leader, or becomes rich, this is only because it is impossible to advance the Malays without a powerful leader or Malay individuals who are successful and rich.

"Islam accepts the fact that there will be people who are poor and those who are rich, those who are given power and those who are not," Dr Mahathir said in his presidential address when opening the 54th Umno general assembly at Dewan Merdeka of the Putra World Trade Centre here.

The Prime Minister, touching on greed and corruption, said Umno could not possibly make all Malays into powerful leaders or rich people but it could reduce poverty, reduce the gap between the rich and the poor.

"We can increase the number of the middle class so that the gap between the rich and the poor is not extreme. We can increase the per capita income and other indicators that can prove that our race has advanced, that we are able to stand as equals with other developed races in the world.

"We cannot make all the people equal in terms of position, power or wealth. There will be among us who will be relatively poor and unable to gain the positions they desire. There will be leaders and followers.

"If we cannot become the Prime Minister, even though we are qualified, we have to accept the fact that there is only one such position. Therefore, qualified or not, if a person has been chosen, then there is no place for others," he said.

Dr Mahathir said even if the post was rotated, there would be those who were interested and yet unable to attain it.

"If we are interested to the extent that we are willing to use money, to ruin the party, the race, religion and nation, what we will gain subsequently is dust from the destruction of our race and nation. Is becoming the leader of a disgraced society the objective of our struggle?"

The party president, who is returned unopposed in the party election, said he had to speak against greed and corruption knowing only too well that it would "incur the wrath of some delegates and candidates towards me".

"But it is better that I incur the wrath of the delegates here rather than cause the people to hate Umno and consequently to reject it. Corruption and greed must be exposed and eradicated."

Dr Mahathir said corruption and greed could destroy the nation and all plans to develop the Malays and other bumiputeras would fail if these became part of Umno's culture.

In direct reference to the party elections, he urged the delegates to reject the corrupt and greedy because "everything will be ruined if corrupt individuals become the Prime Minister or members of the Cabinet".

Making his assessment of Umno members, Dr Mahathir said they had

forgotten the Malay national spirit with many participating in Umno because of the perceived promise of posts, positions and certain benefits.

"There are some who wish to gain wealth the easy way. As a result, they always struggle violently to become leaders in Umno at all levels, from divisional chief to party president."

Dr Mahathir said these members were driven by greed and self-interest, discarding the interest of the party, race or country.

He reminded delegates that in the contest for supreme council seats, they should be displaying acts of moderation and humanity to restore support for the party.

Without mincing his words on money politics, he said not all candidates used money to obtain votes. But then there were delegates to the assembly who solicited support for a price.

These people "are just as bad as those who give out money to gain support".

"Don't they realise that the money they get is haram, no less haram than the proceeds of selling illegal goods?"

Issuing another reminder, Dr Mahathir said delegates who chose someone who bribed them with money were "actually traitors to the people, religion and nation".

"The corrupt leaders that you choose will definitely fail the cause of our struggle for the people, religion and nation. It is our children and grandchildren who will suffer. Our people, religion and nation will be destroyed."

"Therefore, I appeal to all delegates here to reject all candidates who use bribery to gain support for whatever posts, or use other means which could blacken the image of the party and race during campaigning.

"I also want to remind delegates and candidates that membership in the Supreme Council does not guarantee a place in the Government, even if they are already in the Government."

Dr Mahathir also said many had become Umno members without understanding the aims and history of the party's struggles.

"Membership does not mean reaping direct personal benefits from Umno. Membership means we believe Umno's struggles will bring success and progress to the race, religion and nation. These ideals will surely be personally rewarding even if it means just restoring our honour."

Dr Mahathir said Umno should leave behind a legacy of a race that was strong, progressive and respected for the younger children just as Umno pioneers had left behind a nation that was independent.