

# UMNO GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2001

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## Overdue wake-up call to Malays

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DURING the supreme council meeting on Wednesday evening, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad told the council members that he was "frustrated" with the Malays.

The Umno president was concerned that the Malays, despite enjoying government support, were still lagging behind, especially in business and education.

His "frustration" was apparently translated into a no-holds-barred speech at the assembly yesterday.

It was a wake-up call to the Malays and one that was long overdue.

Even one of his most vocal critics, supreme council member Datuk Abdul Shahrir Samad, agrees with Dr Mahathir for once.

"The language is simple, more direct. It highlighted certain aspects of Malay proneness to making decisions based on political considerations as opposed to the non-Malays," he said.

But will the Malays be able to accept the president's rebuke?

Shahrir could not refrain from taking a swipe: "The Malays will be waiting for leads."

Dr Mahathir said with opportunities and scholarships abounding, many Malay students remained uninterested.

But it is the male students in institutions of higher learning who got the harshest words. The president questioned whether they were aware of their responsibilities towards their race, religion and country.

His sarcasm was hardly hidden when he said:

"We are impressed that while the number of male Malay students are few and their results mediocre, they control student bodies.

"Thank God. If not for the female students, the number of Malay students in universities would be reduced by half."

Another supreme council member said it was a timely reminder.

He said Dr Mahathir was worried for the future of the Malays in this era of information technology and globalisation.

"It is high time for the Malays to wake up to meet the challenges.

"Even with government support, the Malays are still not able to compete with other races. Can you imagine how they are going to perform outside Malaysia?"

"Yes, it is nice to be spoiled but can we rely on it forever?"

Yet, some observers noted that Dr Mahathir's address contained no new elements and the response from the delegates was lukewarm.

Said one observer: "He is being repetitive and harping

on the same issues — education, business, foreign and foreign media bashing — since the last few years. Harsher words perhaps, but nothing new really."

The resignation of Tun Daim Zainuddin from all government and party posts, another burning issue, was not raised despite the fact that this was very much on the minds of Umno members.

There are reportedly attempts to table an emergency resolution to discuss Daim's resignation at the general assembly before it concludes tomorrow.

The gist of the president's speech and the note on which he ended it: "Malays, have you forgotten?" conveyed his anxiety.

Dr Mahathir's stinging remarks would no doubt have a varying impact on the different communities.

While the speech may not go down well with the ultra-Malays, it will likely be welcomed by non-Malays who have long felt that the Malays have been pampered. It would underscore the notion that only the fittest can survive in the age of globalisation.

His stinging words would have burned the ears of many Malays. Still, many others would brush them aside as the rantings of an old man.

Whichever the case, they choose the path they walk on.

Hang Tuah may have said the Malays will never vanish from the earth. The challenge for the Malays is to prove him right.