

Touching poem to remind Malays

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DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had promised he would not cry again but the Umno president choked with emotion while delivering a poem entitled *Melayu Mudah Lupa* (Malays Forget Easily) towards the end of the Umno General Assembly yesterday.

According to the composer, who did not wish to be named, it took him two days to write the poem after listening to Dr Mahathir's similarly-titled speech on Thursday.

"I thought of sending it to the newspapers. At the same time I submitted my poem to the Umno secretariat. Next thing I knew it was read out by the president. It's my defining moment," said the writer.

The poem, which also touched the hearts of those present at the general assembly, spoke about how the Malays easily forgot their pain, their disputes, their integrity and mostly their unfinished struggle.

It took Dr Mahathir an hour and 57 minutes on Thursday to remind the Malays of their struggle. Yesterday, he did it in less than a minute by just reading out the poem.

His deputy, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, said that except for a few including Dr Mahathir, permanent chairman Tun Sulaiman Ninam Shah and himself, most of the delegates were from the post-independent generation.

And just how many of this younger-generation Malay leaders got the message?

Supreme council member Datuk Zahid Hamidi was not ashamed to admit that he kissed the hand of Dr Mahathir twice.

"I only kiss the hands of my parents and I am not easily moved, but today after listening to the poem, I cried and I had to kiss his hands twice. I am touched.

"The Malays must translate what he has done for us. There are no two ways about it."

Pulai division deputy chief Datuk Nurjazlan Mohamed said he felt "guilty" after listening to Dr Mahathir's speech.

"This is the real *reformasi*. This means the Malays must improve themselves. They must be aware that they can't go on blaming the government for not doing much.

"There is a certain realisation after the pres-

ident's speech that the Malays have to improve themselves to remain in power," he added.

Tambun division chief Datuk Ahmad Husni Hanadzlah reminded his delegates that their attendance at the assembly would have been pointless if they learned nothing from it.

"It was an honest, open speech," he said of Dr Mahathir's winding-up.

He said he had sent a letter to Abdullah, outlining how the division was now on the "offensive" with all the strategies planned.

"There is now a quality gap between the Malays and global requirements. If we don't bridge this gap, we may face bigger difficulties in the future," he said.

Supreme council member Datuk Shahrir Samad said Dr Mahathir's speech was better received because he talked about Umno being on the offensive and it was directed at PAS, a major enemy of the Malays.

"It was a good speech, suitable for the mood of the delegates which was different from last year when they had just finished with the general election. This time, the delegates are looking forward to the next general election. The tone of the assembly was one that was directed against all PAS campaigns and rallies which criticised Umno and its leaders.

"The fact that Dr Mahathir 'started out 'depersonalising' his position was an important change in his approach. Even that is acceptable to me, his vocal critic," said Shahrir.

In his speech, the Umno president had apologised to Umno members because his ego had got the better of him due to the praises he received from them.

"Then I realised that they are praising the president, not Mahathir Mohamad.

"If you pay compliments to the president, then whatever the president tells you to do, you must be loyal and follow the president's order.

"Then everything will be all right."

Umno critics had brushed aside this year's assembly as one that would be lacklustre. In the end, there was plenty for the members to think about.

But perhaps the X-factor lies in the members themselves, provided they have the grit to do what has been exhorted by Dr Mahathir — to be the master of their own lives.