

25/06/2001

Dr M drives home message on importance of discipline

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WHEN the curtain was lowered on the 55th Umno general assembly at about 6.30pm on Saturday, it became plainly clear to the Malays, especially party members, that if they did not buck up then they can forget about winning the 2004 general elections.

The message of the Umno president, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, is no longer a matter open to interpretation. Instead it is a clear warning and reminder of what needs to be heeded.

When he said that party members should stop the ugly and damaging practice of money politics, he meant that that it was no longer okay to take that haj trips sponsored by some individuals or that Medan or Phuket trips just before the party elections.

When Dr Mahathir admonished party leaders for abandoning their duties towards Umno but instead busied themselves with power struggle and bickerings, he did not mean that it was possible for them to jostle for positions because it was the democratic thing to do so.

When he cried and even prayed for the safety of the Malay race and the party, it was not just crocodile tears or putting a show to fish for sympathy but a genuine concern for future Malay generation.

So this time around when Dr Mahathir spoke for almost two hours, making it the longest ever speech in his 20 years as party president, focusing on the specific theme that the Malays were a forgetful lot, he was not mincing his words either.

The crux of his speech at the end of the three-day party affair was simple - instill discipline in all levels of the party and obey the leadership.

Dr Mahathir gave this recipe of success knowing fully well that there would be party members who would blatantly disregard his advice. Nevertheless, he directed it to the majority of Umno members telling them that they were at a critical crossroad in their struggle.

The salvation of their struggle can only come if they learn to obey the leadership and work towards the goals and objectives set by the party.

Sounds easy, but not so for true party diehards. The party, as the president once described, should work as if being in a hostile environment. This way members will always be alert and in a state of readiness realising that any slack may very well cost them their future and power base.

The cases of Kelantan and Terengganu should by now be an unforgettable lesson for party members to ponder and respond accordingly.

To many, it was a timely reminder and appropriate wake-up call but for Dr Mahathir his words were not only a warning but also a plea for common sense among Umno members.

How could Umno's 2.9 million members win the next general elections and still keep the status of being the dominant ruling party if they do not work hard from this moment to ensure that victory?

If the Malays prefer disunity over unity and mudslinging over mutual cooperation then they have no one to blame if things go wrong or do not work out for them.

Dr Mahathir has already pointed out in his officiating speech that the ratio of Malay male students to female students was 20:80.

The dismal performance of male Malay students in major examinations and hence their inability to secure places in public universities is no longer

a matter that can be brushed aside. It is incumbent upon the Ministry of Education to come up with something to improve the situation.

Umno members, and the Malays in general, should do some soul-searching and indentify factors that have brought about this disturbing phenomena.

The answer, however, lies neither in blaming the Government nor pointing fingers at Government officials, but rather in the inability of the Malay race to adapt and innovate in a globalised environment.

The party president had given various warnings to party members to keep the rank and file in check in the past, but his straight-forward approach to laying out the issues this time is seen as quite out of the ordinary.

It is no longer Umno-bashing but rather haprak (idiot)-bashing.

The word, frequently used in northern slang, is commonly spoken to describe a totally useless person and that was exactly the meaning Dr Mahathir tried to convey as regards to those who sell out the interest of the Malays and the nation.

High on his list of key items was Pas, which he described as a political party that hampered the progress of the Muslims in this country. Contrary to PAS brand of Islam, Dr Mahathir said, Umno had struggled since its inception to put Islam on a high pedestal and respectability that it was enjoying today.

Above all, the progress and economic and social improvement that Umno had brought to the Malays since independence has made them a race that was on par with other Malaysians.

The nation has benefitted from Umno's struggle, he said, adding that Malaysia has become a developed country envied by many nations and considered as a model of economic success and political stability among Muslim nations.

Because of this, the party president was puzzled as to why PAS refused to acknowledge the hard work of Umno and its success in helping the Malays when others proudly profess their admiration and appreciation.

However, if there was one aspect of his speech that most delegates and speakers had missed throughout their debates was Dr Mahathir's passion for information and communications technology (ICT).

As if frustrated on the lack of interest shown on this subject which he held dear to his heart, he repeated it in his closing speech to the general assembly.

He pleaded that the Malays must embrace ICT for their survival; for their very survival in the increasingly borderless world depended on their leap into this arena.

On the purchase of two Chinese dailies by the MCA, he displayed his displeasure at attempts by the DAP to engage him in the dispute.

DAP, he added, would used every available means at its disposal to reclaim the lost ground when it was rejected by the Chinese community in the last general elections.

He won a thundering applause from the floor when he warned the Chinese media not to manipulate any racial issue related to the sale.

Dr Mahathir's firm stance on issues that could disrupt national unity and security suggested that he was not averse to taking on anyone when the need arose.

As a national leader he chastised the Malays for their nonchalant attitude in matters pertaining to them, and at the same time he criticised other races too if they fell out of line.

He slammed the foreign media for false reporting and twisting facts about the country. He is unforgiving when the good name and sovereignty of the nation is at stake.

As delegates leave for their homes, they bear with them the messages they have been entrusted to spread to the Malays, especially Umno members.

The time has come for them to close ranks and fortify their position.

The time has also come for them to realise that the kind of future they want for the party and the country is going to be shaped and moulded by their actions.

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