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Ensure a strong Umno (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Umno members must ensure the party is strengthened if it is to remain the torch-bearer for the Malays, who must also do everything possible to chart their own destiny.

The reminder came from Umno president and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who said the Malays must be masters of their own destiny as success and failure lay in their hands.

Touching on how easily the Malays forget their roots, Dr Mahathir told delegates to the 55th Umno general assembly that the Malays have a bigger responsibility to fulfil.

In his winding-up speech which touched on every fibre of the Malay psyche, Dr Mahathir said: "I would like to request, I want to appeal to (Umno) members to be the pioneers and torch bearers to spur the Malays to become a truly progressive race."

Speaking for one-and-a-half hours, Dr Mahathir turned orator with punchy lines, sometimes humorous, sometimes firm and defiant. It was a speech which showed the fighter in him. The speech was the last major agenda on this year's Umno assembly.

"We can do it with hard work ... we must have confidence that we can do it, we have to work for it," he said, adding that "the Malays must become the masters of themselves".

Calling on the Malays to strive to master knowledge in all fields, including information technology, Dr Mahathir said the success of the country was testimony of their achievement.

He wanted Umno members to spearhead a serious move to master IT so that the knowledge gained can help propel the country further and faster to become a developed nation by 2020.

"Since we came to power we have seen how we (the Malays) have progressed in the last 15 years ... Malay engineers were able to design the Proton cars without having to go to Japan," he said.

Citing Petronas as another success story of the Malays, Dr Mahathir said the national oil corporation is at par with major foreign oil companies such as Esso, Shell, Mobil and BP.

The Prime Minister said the world recognised Petronas' standing among other foreign oil corporations as evident from its operation in 25 countries.

"There are many national oil corporations in the world, but only Petronas was invited to operate in the 25 countries," he said.

Stressing that hardwork would guarantee a bright future, he said whether or not the Malays succeeded in the fields they ventured into depended entirely on themselves and not others.

"We will succeed in whatever field we choose if we are prepared to work hard," he said.

Reminding the Malays that there is no short cut or easy passage to success, Dr Mahathir said the Malays have all the qualities and ability to be successful, but if they are lazy they will continue to lag behind.

The Prime Minister said the Bumiputeras should not depend on the 55 per cent quota set for them to secure places in local public institutions of higher learning.

But even with the quota, he said Bumiputera students only accounted for 25 per cent of the total number of students in local private and public institutions of higher learning. What was important was for the Bumiputera

students to study hard and obtain excellent results so that they could be given scholarships by the government.

"There is nothing that could prevent Bumiputera students from getting places in universities if their results are good," he said.

Dr Mahathir told delegates to be loyal to the President of Umno, and not to Dr Mahathir the man. In this regard, he told delegates and Umno members to support whoever is picked to contest in elections.

Umno members must demonstrate their loyalty to the president and the party by not disputing the choice of candidates chosen for the election.