

22/06/2001

Search your conscience

AAT

Dear Umno members,

So, your annual assembly is here again. As usual, there's much noise and activities at your party headquarters at the Putra World Trade Centre. This is your 55th assembly and a sense of anticipation fills the air.

I saw a lot of laughter and handshakes, giving observers the impression that nothing is amiss. When your Pemuda and Wanita wings met on Wednesday, there was less excitement but Puteri Umno attracted a fair share of media attention.

Yesterday, I saw big pictures of lawlessness, deprivation and hardship mounted on special panels greeting delegates and guests at the foyer, and this seemed to have aroused the curiosity of onlookers.

The pictures showed refugees fleeing their homes following violent ethnic clashes, children deprived of food and shelter and human sufferings brought about by genocide and torture. Many people must have wondered what they were all about.

When your president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad addressed the packed hall in his opening speech, the pictures began to make sense to many people. It was obvious that they were put up for specific reasons.

They were put up to convey a simple message - that the violence and deprivation recorded by the cameras in other countries could easily happen here, in our country, if nothing is done to curb street demonstrations and other forms of militant dissent.

I was unable to get a seat as Dewan Merdeka had standing room only. But watching Dr Mahathir stand on the rostrum just a few minutes short of two hours to deliver his address was enough to make me question my own stamina.

His voice was strong, loud and clear, and I sense that he was pricking your conscience, as well as other Malays in the country. If indeed that was his intention, he has done well as each question he posed was meant to trigger an open-heart examination by all Malays.

I sense he is frustrated to see the Malays he has been leading all this while still taking lightly the predicament they are in. Despite all the support to the Malays provided by the Government which he leads, Dr Mahathir lamented the indifferent attitude of a section of the community towards improving their lot. He seems to be in some sort of a dilemma.

And true to his words, Dr Mahathir mentioned once again that the Malays have short memories, forgetting that in just two generations they seemed to have been distracted by whatever success they have enjoyed.

As Umno members, you have a big task ahead of you. I don't think your president came up with a concrete plan of action to tackle today's issues, preferring instead to see how you react to such a scathing attack on the Malay mentality.

He has devised many plans for the country. It's now time for you to come up with your own plan of action.

Could such a drubbing he gave all of you and the Malays come as a result of his deep fear that the community in general, and Umno in particular, are showing signs of indifference to repeated pleas of quest for knowledge, excellence and unity?

May I suggest you look at yourself in the mirror and make your own assessment. Salams.