

PM: Opposition will collapse

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'They will suffer crushing defeat in next election'

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SHAH ALAM, Sat. — Sounding the battle drums early, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad predicted today the Opposition would suffer a crushing defeat in the next general election.

With Umno getting stronger and recovering lost ground, the party president said Opposition parties should be trembling with fear of the fate awaiting them.

"They say we are weak, we will collapse. But let's wait for the next election and we'll see what will happen to the Opposition."

"They should be afraid as the time (of reckoning) for them is not too far away," he told thousands of Umno members at the party's 56th anniversary celebrations at Stadium Malawati here.

In a taunting message to the Opposition, Dr Mahathir said: "The person and issue you have exploited is no longer an issue in this country."

"Soros suffered losses... serves him right. Now he is into writing and has come out with a book praising our measures, saying we have been right."

In the one-hour speech tracing the historical events leading to the establishment of Umno 56 years ago, Dr Mahathir said no one could deny the role played by the party in uniting the Malays.

The Malays before independence did not act and think as one community, but were divided into small and weak states, and had no leaders capable of uniting them.

Dr Mahathir said it was Umno which united the Malays who were rudely awakened from their slumber with the proposed establishment of the Malayan Union by the British.

"Umno gave birth to a new breed of Malays — Malays who are confident of their ability and dared to look into the eyes of the British and say 'no'.

"This is the biggest success of Umno, uniting the Malays in opposing the British. We succeeded because we were united, even the weak will become strong if they are

Dr Mahathir said the Barisan Nasional Government had never been afraid to face the people for a new mandate.

In 1999, although confronted with various issues and problems which some said would cause the downfall of BN, the Prime Minister, who is also BN chairman, said the general election was called.

"We went to the polls and BN won more than two-thirds of the seats in Parliament."

Dismissing criticism that Malaysia was undemocratic, Dr Mahathir said the country had always been one. He said detractors could continue with their criticism until they frothed from the mouth but the Government would be unfazed.

"Malaysia is a democratic country. We have been independent for 44 years, but we have had 10 general elections when in fact it should only be eight."

He said critics of Malaysia's unorthodox ways in dealing with the financial crisis, including currency speculator George Soros, now had to eat their own words.

united which can defeat stronger opponents."

Dr Mahathir said the British caved in and acceded to the wishes of the Malays after seeing their strong objection against the Malayan Union.

He said the younger generation should be grateful to Umno because if not for the party's struggle in defending the rights of the community, the Malays would have lost out.

"If not for Umno, perhaps Malaysia will be like Singapore where the Malays become the minority group, not having a place even in their own country."

The Prime Minister said Malaysia, steered by the Umno-led Government, had achieved such tremendous progress since independence that the country was now seen as a model for other developing countries.

"From a country under colonial rule, we have become a model for others. Many foreign leaders visit us now, wanting to learn our for-

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'Young leaders must be knowledgeable'

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-mula for success."

When the country was hit by racial riots in 1969, many predicted it was the end for Malaysia.

But Dr Mahathir said the Umno-led Government persevered, coming up with policies and programmes which were able to arrest the unhappiness and tension among the people.

"Since then, we never had to contend with any more racial riots. This is a tremendous achievement, something which is difficult to see happening in other countries, let alone in multi-racial nations."

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia's success rested on the ability of its people to resolve problems through discussion instead of confrontation.

Reminding the younger generation in Umno of their role and responsibility, he said they must equip them-

selves with knowledge and skills before taking over the task of running the party and country.

"I hope the Youth and Puteri members, when assuming the country's leadership, will not forget the struggles of their elders.

"I also hope they will ensure that the country is able to stand tall internationally."

Dr Mahathir said the Malays possessed similar qualities as other races, hence there should not be any reason why they could not take on the world.

He added that many Malaysians had shown their true grit, the latest example being swimmer and former national cyclist Abdul Malik Mydin who was attempting to swim 34km across the English Channel,

Dr Mahathir said in the Government, employees retired upon reaching 56 years of age but Umno would continue to serve the country.