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PM's speech a wake-up call

"INSPIRING, sincere and honest." This was how Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's address yesterday was described by Umno and Barisan Nasional leaders, who also regarded the Umno president's speech as a reminder to the Malays to change for the better.

Umno deputy president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the party was not afraid of losing popularity for its criticism of the Malays because history had proven that such criticism was necessary.

The Deputy Prime Minister said if Umno wanted to be popular by giving in to all that the Malays wanted, the race would not have progressed.

"Umno is like a strict teacher. A strict teacher may not be popular but at the end of the day, the student comes back and says 'thank you'," he said.

On Dr Mahathir's comment that the decline of the social and cultural values among the Malays could cause the collapse of the Malay race, Abdullah said parents played an important role in guiding their children.

Gerakan president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik described the speech as "very inspiring", adding the Umno president did the right thing by pushing for the Malays to change for the better.

"He also reminded the Malays to stick to the fundamental teachings of Islam and to keep to a moderate view," noted Lim, who is also Primary Industries Minister.

Dr Lim said the medical-trained Prime Minister should know how to diagnose the problems of the Malays and offer treatment.

Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said Dr Mahathir wanted the Malays to work hard for their own good.

"The Malays should not be overly protected and our Prime Minister believes the Malays can stand on their own."

Najib, however, said the Government could not remove all the tenets contained in the National Economic Policy and special privileges of the Malays.

"There must be gradual understanding among the races in the country to enable the Malays to succeed further."

Najib said Dr Mahathir was not seeking popularity with his speech, but results.

"He wants the Malays to be at par (with) and respected by other races. He knows this will not happen overnight as these are not cosmetic changes.

"It is not a hopeless call and the Malays must be united before they can expect positive results."

Najib said changing the Malay mindset could not be achieved within a short period of time.

Umno vice-president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said although the party president's advice was hard-hitting, delegates should view it positively.

He said Dr Mahathir was trying to inject new spirit into the party and the community to ensure the country was ready to face the challenges of a borderless world.

"There are no differences whatsoever between the minds of the Malays and other races," he said. "We are not inferior in any way. The problem is we are not maximising our potential."

Umno Youth chief Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein said the Malays should shed their narrow-mindedness and realise they are moving into a borderless environment.

"The young are the most important group now," he said. "They must resolve to make the necessary changes and prepare themselves to be the leaders of tomorrow."

Wanita chief Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz said women in the country must be aware of discriminatory and 'man-made' laws, especially those formulated by Pas.

She said Pas leaders, especially Terengganu Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang, had been harping on the so-called qisas and hudud with the hope they could renew public interest in the party.

"Pas has been talking about hudud for many years and realising that the general election may be near, they have begun talking about it again. This is just part of their political ploy to gain support."

MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu said Dr Mahathir's advice on efforts to strengthen family institutions should be heeded not only by the Malays but by other races, too.

He said the Malays should take to heart such advice, which was aimed at uplifting their living standards.

"I fully support whatever has been said by Dr Mahathir as he means well and wants to see more progress to be made not only by the Malays but also other races in the country."

The Malays, he added, must move forward in order to remain competitive and competent. "All races in the country must help one another for unity and strength."

Religious adviser to the Prime Minister Tan Sri Abdul Hamid Othman said the Malays must never lose sight of the fundamentals that form the basis of their lives.

"The Malays must never forget these fundamentals or they will become weak and be in disarray, in the world and the hereafter," he said.

Supreme Council member and Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said Dr Mahathir was frank, sincere and forthright in his views about the need for the Malays to change their attitude.

Today's keynote address, he said, would be remembered for a long time as it touched on the Malays' future.

"The Malays must be prepared to change their mindset. They must not think they will have the privileges and rights forever," he said.

Perak Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Tajol Rosli Ghazali said Malays must learn to stand on their own.

He added the Malays should learn new technologies and increase their knowledge to compete with others.

Umno veteran Tan Sri Aziz Tapa said Malays had adopted change but the process had been slow.

"They will change, usually when there is pressure around them," he said, adding that Malays took a longer time to change than other races because things are relatively easy for them.

Aziz said one way to ensure the Malays become receptive to change was to keep on telling them to do so.

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