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Issues debated at 56th Umno general assembly in the limelight

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THE 56th Umno general assembly literally took over the pages of Bahasa Malaysia dailies last week with comprehensive coverage on special rights, education and the challenge from Pas.

Though the debate was not necessarily in that order, Umno leaders and delegates were clear on issues that needed public airing.

Berita Harian, in an editorial on Friday, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's opening address sent home the message that Malays should take stock of their weaknesses and address them.

The newspaper said the Prime Minister achieved what he had set out to do in his two-hour-and-15-minute speech, which was to create an awareness of what the community should do in the future.

It noted that Dr Mahathir did not even touch on the issue of education which has been making the front pages of Bahasa Malaysia newspapers recently, lest he divert focus from more urgent issues.

Berita Harian said that despite the Prime Minister apologising for not succeeding so far in transforming the Malays, the community also had to shoulder the lion's share of the blame.

It was clear, it said, that the most important message was that the Malays were not safe as long as they were not united, unable to master knowledge in all fields and were economically weak.

Berita Harian, in exhorting the Malays to accept Dr Mahathir's message in the right spirit, said the community would only move forward if it was willing to identify its weaknesses and correct them.

Utusan Malaysia, in its editorial on Friday, said the Malay community could only be free and able to stand on its feet if it made efforts to discard the cloak of poverty and weaknesses.

The newspaper, commenting on Dr Mahathir's opening address, said it was an eye-opener on what ailed the Malays and what should be done to address the community's current woes.

One of the most urgent issues to be tackled, the newspaper opined, was that of disunity within the community which had also weakened the international Islamic community.

It felt that even others outside Umno's pale should unite on issues involving the community.

This general assembly also saw the coming of age of Puteri Umno with its first-ever assembly gaining the interest of all Malaysians.

Berita Harian, in an editorial yesterday, advised the newest wing in Umno to get its focus right and not meander from its chosen objectives.

It should try to win the hearts and minds of the 500,000 young Malay women who will be eligible to vote in the next general election, it said.

Berita Harian felt that Puteri Umno should act as a conduit between young graduates and professionals and Umno.