

11/05/2003

Continuing Umno's struggle

Ainon Mohd

THIS time, Umno's anniversary celebrations have an added significance. Undoubtedly, the occasion is special, emotional even, because it will be the last with Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad as party president. He retires in October and deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi succeeds him.

With the next general election on the horizon, this celebration is also an opportunity for Umno to reestablish its position as the custodian of the Malays.

The celebrations, to be held at Merdeka Stadium tonight, will be broadcast live on television. They are likely to be the biggest ever event, with over 50,000 people expected to join Umno leaders and party veterans as well as the leaders of the Barisan Nasional component parties.

The theme, Perjuangan Sebuah Bangsa (the Struggle of a Nation), reflects Umno's spirit in striving to strengthen and unite not only the Malays, but the other ethnic groups too.

This year's choice of venue is also poignant. It has a historical significance, being the place where the second Umno president, Tengku Abdul Rahman Putra, raised his arms in the air to proclaim Malaysia's independence.

Besides the traditional flagraising ceremony, various events have been lined up, including a thanksgiving dinner. Seminars on Umno's struggle will be held simultaneously in all divisions.

This evening, Merdeka Stadium will be the focal point of the event. Party president Dr Mahathir is scheduled to deliver a keynote address that will dwell mostly on the Malays and Umno's struggle in the last five decades.

In his speech, Dr Mahathir is expected to touch on unity and how Malays as well as Malaysians should remain united as unity was the most potent weapon used in the fight against the colonial masters and the Malayan Union, and for Independence.

The nascent Umno struggle was for independence, or Merdeka. The objective and struggle clear, the people stood united and gave undivided support to the party until the country was free.

This further proved that unity among the party members and the races was of paramount importance to the nation and the people's well-being.

Dr Mahathir has always reflected on Umno's history and struggle, achievements and failures, and the various paths as well as obstacles.

Tonight, many expect the Umno president to continue this reminder to carry on the party struggle and never to repeat past mistakes.

Since the colonial era, the country has risen to become one of the most dynamic economies, not only in Southeast Asia but also the world. And Umno has been the dominant political party all the way.

The Malays have achieved significant progress, something Umno's founding fathers may not have believed possible.

They have enjoyed the fruits of Merdeka over the last 47 years and began to rise again, going from strength to strength in all fields.

Starting with their domination in politics, followed by achievements in science and technology, and strengthening Islam. In fact, this success has made Umno the main pillar of Malaysia's political system.

As the oldest political party, Umno has gone through many trials and tribulations over the years, some of which threatened its very existence.

But the country's ability to rise above its ethnic differences and deliver a steadily growing prosperity to its people is due in large part to the continuity and firm leadership provided by Umno.

Umno, although a party of the Malays, has not confined its struggle to improving the fortunes of any particular race, but worked for all Malaysians. And it will continue to safeguard the interests of all the people of Malaysia.

At this time, Umno faces greater challenges, with new expectations from the Malays, and the others for a more progressive society.

Indeed, they cannot afford to be complacent or satisfied with their achievements and successes. The Malays must continue the race to ensure that they will not be reduced to what they once were - an inferior and colonised race incapable of competing with others.

The uncertain worldwide political climate and the new era of globalisation are among the many challenges in this millennium.

At home, an increasingly sophisticated and educated society demands a stronger and more relevant party. And as the country progresses in the 21st century, unity of utmost importance not only for the Malays, but for all the races.

And Umno should lead the way.