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Courageous speech, say observers

FOREIGN observers to Umno's 54th annual assembly praised Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's presidential address, saying it was courageous and out-lined a way for which Umno, the Malays and Malaysia could take to continue the country's successes.

They also pointed to Dr Mahathir's warning about the threat posed by European powers who were bent on re-colonising the world through the guise of globalisation.

Some also expressed sadness at seeing Dr Mahathir deliver one of his last speeches before he steps down in October.

For Singapore Malay National Organisation president Borhan Arrifin, Dr Mahathir's speech had a global scope from which many countries which look up to his administration could take heed.

Singapore, he said, should share its views on the fear of the recurrence of colonialism and be as vocal in opposing the West's crude behaviour, which had no regard for other members of the global community.

Borhan added that Umno members must seriously adhere to Dr Mahathir's advice if they wanted the party to remain strong.

Bangladesh Post and Telecommunications Minister Md Aminul Hoque said many developing countries could relate to the fears and worries of Dr Mahathir as expressed in his speech.

Witnessing the assembly for the first time, he said delegates from his country were overwhelmed by the Umno president's inspiring speech that was not only for Malaysians, but the world over.

"The message was for all, his vision was for all. I have heard a lot about the leader and his visions. But today, looking at the response of Malaysians and the impact he has on them, it is not something every leader would get."

He said Dr Mahathir's point that European countries were bulldozing international laws and rights, and threatening smaller countries should be taken seriously.

He concurred with Dr Mahathir in that fellow developing Muslim countries must stick to the true teachings of Islam while embracing new technology to ensure continued progress.

Bosnia-Herzegovina's Party of Democratic Action vice-president Elmir Jahic said listening to Dr Mahathir's last address was emotional, as the Prime Minister was a kind and good friend to the Bosnian people.

"The Malaysian Government and Umno have contributed much to our country during the conflict in 1992 and in the country's reconstruction ... Like Malaysia, Bosnia is multi-racial and multi-religious.

"The country is a practical school for us on how to develop a country," he said.

Jahic said although Europeans have historically been responsible for wars and colonisation, it was also important to look at the region's contributions to the world.

"We must think of ourselves as global citizens and work towards the betterment of the global community," he said in response to Dr Mahathir's point about European powers' interest in colonising the world again.

Indonesia's Partai Persatuan Pembangunan vice-president Zarkasih Nur said he was awed by Dr Mahathir's criticism of European powers as many Third World leaders subscribed to similar views, but were not courageous enough to express them.

"He is a national leader who has genuinely served his party and the nation, and not for his personal interests. Leaders who get into politics to serve their own interests end up ruining their party and the country."

Syrian Al-Baath Socialist Party deputy president Abdullah Al-Ahmar said Dr Mahathir's adoption of moderate Islam and his rejection of extremism had succeeded in developing the nation and race that were now known the world over.

"We will stand behind Dr Mahathir and Umno in its condemnation of European powers who seek to recolonise the world."

China's Communist Party international department central committee deputy head Cai Wu said Dr Mahathir's speech left a very deep impression on foreign delegations.

"The country's success, which Dr Mahathir attributed to the unity among its multiracial society, is a very important experience for us to keep in mind."

Cai Wu, who is here for the seventh time to witness the Umno assembly, said although it would be the president's last year, Umno would continue to progress and enhance development as the spirit to achieve Dr Mahathir's Vision 2020 was burning.

On the president's view that the emergence of China in the global economic sector was threatening European countries, Wu said China took its hat off to the country's leaders for looking at the progress and the republic as a land of opportunities, and not a threat, to the world.

Surendra K. Arora of India's ruling party Bharatiya Janata said Dr Mahathir was very frank in criticising the Europeans.

He added that Malaysians should be thankful to have been blessed with such a leader who was instrumental in bringing their country to what it was today.

Pakistan's Parliamentarians Commission for Human Rights chairman Rias Fatyana said the leader's call for serious focus on economic growth and alleviation of poverty was laudable.

He said Dr Mahathir had proven to be a great leader in the region with the advancement he had brought about and the influence he had on leaders in the region.

"Just look at the transition of the country under his leadership, like Kuala Lumpur, which is now one of the most beautiful cities in the world."