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Mahathir disappoints in London

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COMMENT One word sums up former PM Mahathir Mohamad's talk in London on Sept 21. 'Pathetic!'

Nothing is too harsh, not when the future of a country is at stake. The Malaysians who wanted to hear Mahathir came for one thing. His message of hope. There was very little of that. He covered a lot of old ground. There was hardly anything new.

The session did not live up to the usual high standards of Mahathir. To be fair, it was not Mahathir's fault. He was his usual, brilliant, lucid self. His stamina equals that of a man who is 30 years younger. The fault lay in the quality of the questions. They were neither challenging nor difficult. The Q & A session was a walkover.

The analogy of Mahathir's event in London is simple. Malaysians who expected a nice, home-cooked makan had to be content with yesterday's sandwiches. Dry bread and soggy filling. Neither exciting, nor palatable. Was it Asian deference and respect for one's elders that prevented the Malaysians in the audience from posing more penetrating questions about the reformed Malaysia he wants us to embrace?

Do the foreigners at the talk really know how serious things are at home? The Brits appeared to have been struck down by Mahathir's 'Melayu mudah lupa' syndrome, and forgotten that at one time, he advocated a policy of 'Buy British last'. Questions on the Commonwealth, foreign investment and disunity in the Arab World mean nothing to the Mak Cik in Felda, or Ah Chong, the handphone accessories trader, whose business may be affected if the red shirts descend on KL.

These general questions were of little significance to the concerned Malaysians in the Macmillan Hall eager to hear his message of hope. The crux of the Malaysian problem is corruption; corruption of one's morals, political corruption, grand corruption, petty corruption. To bolster corruption in Malaysia, politicians use religion as one of the main tools to silence the Malays.

The rise at home of religious intolerance, religious extremism and religious stupidity is worrying. Religious stupidity is the stupid emphasis on halal lifts or statues, in the name of religion. Some people in the audience appear to have forgotten that Mahathir, like other leaders throughout history, used religion to serve his purpose. He renamed a department in charge of Islamic affairs to Jakim. Today, Jakim is a monster with an appetite that is insatiable.

Mahathir's Islamisation process started at the time of the Iranian revolution, when PAS was making headways into the Malay electorate. Anwar Ibrahim his deputy, was recruited for his Islamic credentials as leader of the Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (Abim) and because he was a firebrand student leader. The Islamisation, or rather the Talibanisation of the Malays, has gained traction in recent years, because no one, not even Mahathir, thought to put the brakes