

Give me backing and I will act, Dr M tells Umno members

Curbing money politics

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KUALA TERENGGANU, Sun. — Party leadership can only deal effectively with those who indulge in money politics if there is backing from members. This was the point made by Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to Umno today.

"If members themselves do not give their support, then it will be extremely difficult for the party leadership to take appropriate action.

"Whatever action to be taken by me will only be effective with the support of the majority of Umno members.

"Umno is a democratic party and leaders will only have power when they have the backing and support of members," the Prime Minister said today.

Opening the Hulu Terengganu Umno division delegates meeting at the Kuala Berang Town Hall, 40km from here, Dr Mahathir, speaking as Umno president, said members must be alert against those out to curry favour with them for self gain.

He realised that quite a number of Umno members had been throwing a lot of money into efforts to become branch or divisional leaders.

"I know somebody who spent up to \$600,000 to become a divisional chairman.

"Some are hoping that by becoming divisional leaders, they may be selected to stand in the next general election.

Legal action

"However, this was not the criteria for candidates."

Dr Mahathir said he was disappointed that some members gave their support to such leaders without realising that their action could spell disaster for the party.

He said using money to climb the ladder of leadership was no better than corruption.

Some people accepted all-expenses-paid trips to Tokyo and Medan while others accepted pilgrimage to Mecca.

Dr Mahathir also spoke of the practice among some members to take legal action at the slightest provocation.

"Matters used to be referred to either the division, State liaison or Umno headquarters before, but now even a slight dissatisfaction at branch level is brought to court."

These people thought that the court could solve their problems by employing lawyers from Opposition parties and spending a lot of money.

"In actual fact, the courts cannot solve problems of political parties," Dr Mahathir said.

For example, a person dissatisfied with the result of a branch election pursued the matter in court and obtained judgment in his favour.

"In the eyes of the law he may win but still he will not win the support of members because those who dislike him will not support him.

"As a result, the party will be divided."

Members ought to refer to Umno headquarters any problem that cropped up so that it could be resolved through "political means" to safeguard party unity.