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KANGAR, MARCH 14 (BERNAMA) -- PRIME MINISTER DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD TODAY HIT OUT AT UMNO MEMBERS WHO RESORTED TO THE LEGAL PROCESS TO MAINTAIN THEIR POSITIONS IN THE PARTY.

+SUCH MEMBERS GIVE IMPORTANCE TO SELF-INTERESTS RATHER THAN THE INTERESTS OF THE PARTY,+ HE SAID AT A MEETING WITH UMNO MEMBERS AT RUMAH TETAMU HERE.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR, WHO IS ALSO UMNO PRESIDENT, SAID ALTHOUGH AN INDIVIDUAL HAD THE RIGHT TO RESORT TO SUCH MEASURES, IT WOULD BE MORE PROPER FOR HIM TO EXHAUST ALL AVENUES IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PARTY CONSTITUTION BEFORE TAKING THE MATTER TO THE COURTS.

HE DESCRIBED THESE MEMBERS AS THOSE WHO HAD FORGOTTEN THE ORIGINAL STRUGGLE OF THE PARTY.

+WHAT IS MORE SADDENING IS THAT THESE UMNO MEMBERS OBTAIN THE ADVICE AND SERVICES OF LAWYERS WHO THEY KNOW BELONG TO OPPOSITION PARTIES,+ HE SAID. -- MORE  
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+WE ARE ALL AWARE THAT OPPOSITION PARTIES ARE PREPARED TO GIVE LEGAL ADVICE AND SERVICES BECAUSE THEY HOPE THAT THEIR ASSISTANCE WILL EVENTUALLY BREAK UP UMNO,+ HE SAID.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID OF IMPORTANCE WERE NOT POSITIONS AT THE BRANCH, DIVISIONAL OR NATIONAL LEVELS BUT THE PARTY ITSELF.

IF THE COURT WERE TO DECIDE THAT A BRANCH MEETING, FOR EXAMPLE, WAS NOT VALID, THEN THE DIVISIONAL MEETING AND SUBSEQUENTLY THE PARTY'S GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND ELECTION OF THE PARTY'S LEADERS WOULD BE NOT VALID ALSO BECAUSE DELEGATES FROM THE PARTICULAR BRANCH WOULD HAVE SAT AT ALL THESE MEETINGS, HE SAID.

+UMNO HAS REGULATIONS AT BRANCH, DIVISIONAL AND GENERAL ASSEMBLY LEVEL TO RESOLVE PROBLEMS THAT DO NOT REQUIRE A COURT TO SETTLE,+ HE SAID.

THE PRIME MINISTER SAID HE FEARED THAT UMNO WOULD NOT REMAIN IN EXISTENCE FOR LONG IF EVERY PARTY MEMBER CHOSE TO RESOLVE HIS PROBLEM BY GOING TO THE COURTS INSTEAD OF REFERRING TO THE REGULATIONS FIRST

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HE ADVISED THESE MEMBERS TO REVERT THEIR ATTENTION TO THE ORIGINAL STRUGGLE OF UMNO WHICH HE SAID HAD HAULED MALAY SOCIETY FROM A DEGRADING POSITION TO ONE THAT HAS SUCCEEDED IN BECOMING THE LEADER OF MALAYSIA.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR THEN REMINDED UMNO MEMBERS TO BE WARY OF THE VARIOUS INTERPRETATIONS OF ISLAM INTRODUCED BY CERTAIN OPPOSITION GROUPS TO WEAKEN THEIR STRUGGLE.

HE SAID THAT ALTHOUGH UMNO REFERRED THE MEASURES IT TOOK TO THE SUNNAH AND THE QURAN, THESE GROUPS WOULD PROVIDE DIFFERENT INTERPRETATIONS.

+THIS SHOWS THAT THESE GROUPS ARE PREPARED TO USE RELIGION AS AN ISSUE NOT FOR THE SAKE OF THE TRUTH ITSELF BUT FOR THEIR POLITICAL INTERESTS,+ HE SAID.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR ADVISED UMNO MEMBERS TO STRENGTHEN SOLIDARITY TO KEEP ISLAM IN THE COUNTRY FREE FROM POLITICAL INFLUENCES. -- MORE

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HE SAID EVERY EFFORT BY THE GOVERNMENT TO PROPAGATE ISLAM WAS CARRIED OUT NOT FOR POLITICAL REASONS BUT FOR THE SAKE OF MUSLIMS IN THE COUNTRY.

THE PRIME MINISTER SAID MUSLIMS MADE UP 50 PER CENT OF THE MALAYSIAN POPULATION AND EVERY MEASURE MUST BE TAKEN TO OVERCOME WEAKNESSES THAT MIGHT EXIST AMONG THEM.

HE SAID A COUNTRY WHICH HAD A MUSLIM POPULATION OF 90 PER CENT INTRODUCED ISLAMIC PRINCIPLES WITHOUT FIRST OVERCOMING THESE WEAKNESSES AND THERE WAS CHAOS IN THE COUNTRY AFTERWARDS.

+MALAYSIA IS AWARE OF THESE WEAKNESSES AND IS STRIVING TO OVERCOME THEM,+ HE SAID.

ALSO PRESENT AT THE MEETING WERE PERLIS MENTERI BESAR DATUK HAJI ALI HAJI AHMAD, DEPUTY HOME MINISTER ENCIK RADZI SHEIKH AHMAD AND FORMER PERLIS MENTERI BESAR DATUK HAJI JAAFAR HASSAN. -- BERNAMA

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