

No need to pledge loyalty to me: PM

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KANGAR, Mon. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that loyalty to him is not a criterion for acceptance into Umno Baru.

Dr Mahathir, who is the pro tem president, said it was not true that those who wanted to join Umno Baru were forced to make a pledge of loyalty to him.

"That is a lie. All I had said was that those who destroyed the old Umno have lost their rights to join Umno Baru."

He added that every organisation had the right to approve or reject applications for membership.

"Members who work towards destroying an organisation are a threat to the body and there is no reason why this (rejection of their application to become members) should be an issue," he told a Press conference before leaving for Kuala Lumpur at the end of his visit to Perlis.

The Prime Minister was here to launch the Semarak (Loyalty with the People Movement) campaign for Perlis at Sungai Batu Pahat, 12km from here, yesterday.

Dr Mahathir said the old Umno had also rejected membership applications from Malays and former PAS members. The party had to be convinced that applicants would adhere to the party's struggle, he added.

"Some Umno members, including me, were also dismissed from the party. But the fact remains that all Malays have the right to apply to become members of Umno Baru ... whether they are accepted is another matter," he said.

"How can we accept those who destroyed the old Umno? If they are accepted, they may take the party to court again and destroy Umno. What good will it do if Umno is banned again because of this group?"

Dr Mahathir said that Umno faced problems because there were people who were too ambitious.

"If we hold on to the Umno tradition of not contesting the leadership, there would not be any problem."

Dr Mahathir also said that those who had been dropped or replaced as party division leaders could still apply to join the party as members.

"They were replaced because of their actions, statements and accusations against Umno Baru ... we felt that they were not suitable and lacked (a sense of) responsibility..."

"There is no question of favouritism here. The question is whether they had contributed towards the problems faced by the party," he said.

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"How can we accept those who do not help in solving the problems faced by the party but instead add more problems for us?"

He said that some former Umno division heads who were also MPs were not present at the Dewan Rakyat during the recent debate and voting on the Constitution (Amendment) Bill.

"Everyone knew that their presence and participation in the voting was important," he said.

Dr Mahathir said many former Umno members were now joining Umno Baru and enrolment of members was in progress throughout the country.

He said he could not give the figures now because "if I do, the figures will be used by certain quarters to belittle Umno again."

Dr Mahathir also said the Umno supreme council had not made any decision on whether the Youth and Wanita heads should be appointed and not elected.

Referring to the recent incident in Kelantan where Menteri Besar Datuk Haji Mohamad Yaacob was not called upon to make his loyalty speech to the Sultan in conjunction with the Ruler's birthday celebrations, he said the palace should not get involved in politics.

"But the palace may advise on such matters as unity among the people," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said the Government was monitoring the activities of a group of "trouble-makers" out to instigate Kelantanese to isolate themselves from other Malaysians.

"We are keeping a close watch on them to prevent the problem from spreading to other States," he said.

He criticised some people who he said were supporting foreign magazines in smearing the image of Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir said the magazines thought they could rule any country in the world better than the politicians and the existing Government.

"They will comment on how a country should be run when they themselves have no experience in running one," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the magazines would continue to smear Malaysia's reputation for their own interest.

"However, we have continued to enjoy support and many foreigners have come in with investments."