

FOCUS ON TWO ISSUES

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. —
The outcome of the Umno vice-presidential race and the role of the constitutional monarch dominated discussions at the general assembly here today.

Both inside and outside the conference hall, the delegates were either talking about the new second-liners or the alleged involvement of Rulers in politics.

On both counts, many were frank, and not merely in private exchange of views.

Umno members themselves were not spared blame for violating the division of powers between the monarchy and the executive "for personal political interests."

As for the vice-presidential line-up of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and Datuk Seri Sanusi Junid, some delegates wanted proof that they would work together.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad seemed satisfied enough. "It was a good decision," he said of their selection.

He conceded that allegations had been made during the run-up to the polls, but felt sure that "these had not been so obvious or direct that they cannot now work with one another."

The three themselves declared that they would be "looking forward" and not backwards, and be working closely for the party.

A delegate, during the debate on the presidential address, sought evidence of that.

"During the campaign, supporters of Sanusi were angry with those seen with Anwar. And Anwar's people were angry with members for talking to Sanusi," he said.

To the loud approval of the others, the delegate asked the three to shake hands with the

Umno president and his deputy, Encik Abdul Ghafar Baba, and to stand behind them.

The Federal Territory representative insisted that they jointly raise their hands in a show of solidarity "so that we can send a message of unity to all."

And he told them that they "should not be thinking now of being Prime Minister" and concentrate on their job.

He urged them to remember

that "not all Rajas can become a Sultan." The analogy reflected the other preoccupation of the delegates.

The Negri Sembilan representative, who seconded the resolution on constitutional monarchy, accused the opposition of bringing Rulers into politics.

Not all the criticisms were directed outwards: "Umno cannot blame the palace entirely because we stabbed ourselves in the back when some of us

dragged in the Rulers to achieve personal political interests."

After giving many examples of how mentris besar had to be removed because they were not favoured by Rulers, he stressed the right of the ruling party to exercise the mandate given by the people without palace interference.

His speech was interrupted many times by long and loud cheering.

The debate on the resolution begins tomorrow, but the stand of Umno is already clear. As is the message it wants to send.

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