

PM: STOP DIRTY

Money politics can destroy Umno, Mahathir

KUALA LUMPUR: Circulation of poison-pen letters, dirty campaign tactics and money politics dominated the Umno general assembly which opened yesterday.

Party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, setting the tone for the debate in his opening address, repeatedly called for greater party unity as aspiring contenders for next year's polls stepped up their campaigns.

Speaking at length on this, Dr Mahathir told of overseas trips being sponsored and money being freely spent to woo delegates.

He cautioned intending contenders in next year's elections against using money politics.

"Poison-pen letters which contain lies and details of party secrets have been circulated. Books have been printed to discredit certain leaders," he said.

The Prime Minister said government facilities were also being misused for political gain.

Emphasising the importance of party unity, he said it was meaningless to be elected if in the end, the party was destroyed.

Dr Mahathir asked delegates whether they had learned from the party in-fighting following the 1986 elections.

"I would like to say yes but the fact is that there are those who have not. For the elections at branch and division levels, unhealthy campaigning is being carried out," he said.

At a press conference later, Dr Mahathir said he was not happy with this kind of campaigning.

Asked how bad it was, he replied: "Not very bad, (but) all bad things begin with small things."

He also refuted a suggestion by a reporter there were two factions, saying that the underhand

tactics the reporter mentioned were the work of individuals and not factions.

In his speech, Dr Mahathir said there could only be one Umno president and one Prime Minister.

"Even if we have 100 talented people, only one will get that seat. The other 99 will fail," he said, adding that if the party was split, whoever became the Prime Minister would not be respected.

Dr Mahathir said there were those who sabotaged the party by working with the opposition after failing to achieve what they wanted in the party.

He said these people were worse than the party's enemies as they had committed treachery.

Dr Mahathir said if the 1987 incident, which led to Umno being de-registered, was repeated, the party would be wrecked and might not recover again.

"It will not just be the Malays and bumiputras who will suffer but the country may become weak, lose respect and be played out by others," he said.

Dr Mahathir recalled the events which led to the party crisis in 1987 and the dire consequences when democracy was misused.

These worries were echoed in the speeches of almost every speaker during the debate on the presidential address.

Umno vice-presidents Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and Datuk Seri Sanusi Junid all endorsed Dr Mahathir's warning, saying it was timely.

Anwar said Dr Mahathir's call would help clear up such underhand tactics at this early stage of campaigning.

Sanusi said evidence of dirty campaigning could be seen in certain publications which had been used to carry "false news."

tells hopefuls

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