

# Party unity gets top priority

08 NOV 1992



THE Umno general assembly addressed the spectre of factionalism and splits in the party yesterday with concerned delegates calling on the leadership to name the successors to the present Umno leadership to end the intense campaigning for succession.

One delegate urged the party president to act early to check the scramble among aspiring leaders by naming the man he wanted as the next president and stop what was building up to be a fiery battle for the vice-presidency next year.

FT delegate Datuk Azman Attar Osman took the stage and called for changes to the Constitution to abolish the three vice-president's posts which he described as the "root of trouble."

Party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad however believed that naming his successor would not solve the unity and factionalism issue and may split the party instead.

CI Reports by: CHUA YEW KAY, WONG CHUN WAI, HARPAJAN SINGH, WONG SAI WAN, ZULKIFLI TALIB, ROHAIZAD A. RAHIM, LEE KAR YEAN, MARK KONG, SHAHANAAZ SHER HABIB and SHARIFAH MELORA

□ Pictures by: ABDULLAH SUBIR and ABDUL GHANI ISMAIL

"The mere fact of naming my successor will not help. It may even split up the party and will be very undemocratic. In our system it is the members who indicate the person of their choice and we will leave it to them."

Acknowledging the concern shown by delegates on what was described at the assembly as "indications that Umno could be heading towards a repetition of what transpired in 1987" Dr Mahathir said the important thing was to make members realise the tradition of co-operation in Umno.

"We can only appeal and reason with them and if they appreciate the need, they will unite," he added.

Vice-president Datuk Haji Abdullah Ahmad Badawi was quick to refute that there were factions at the vice-presidents

level, adding that there were no problems between him and the two other VPs (Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and Datuk Seri Sanusi Junid).

He said the VPs did not have any factions as delegates had implied and blamed certain supporters who were anxious to find their own *towkays* for creating nucleuses around leaders.

As the debate moved to the second resolution, on economics, at mid-day, the assembly adopted a more subdued mood as delegates echoed Dr Mahathir's call to "think big."

The need for Malaysians to specialise in economic-related fields dominated the debate yesterday with delegates pressing for privatised corporate agencies to lead the country in the stride to assume a multi-national role.

Delegates from various states threw in dozens of proposals on how the Government could expedite efforts to balance the economic composition of the multi-racial setup.

Almost all State Umnos were in unison in proposing that a concrete groundwork was needed for this objective through the setting up of higher learning institutes to train school leavers and youths in management, accountancy, administration and entrepreneurship.

They pressed for economic-related studies to be given equal preference which had been accorded by the Government in the training of technical and industrial manpower to meet shortcomings of labour-intensive industries.

Dr Mahathir, responding to these points, said Malays would gain by grouping into collective ventures as this would enable them to pool larger capital.

"Like in mining for example, what I mean by thinking big is that one entrepreneur will not have the capacity or capital but as a group, they could form a company which could do more and reduce overheads.

"The same applies to taxis. If a single owner's taxi breaks down, he has to suffer losses. If they group up and have a company with 100 taxis, the overheads will not be serious even if 10 taxis broke down the same day," he added.

Today, the assembly will debate on a resolution on religion. This is scheduled to be completed, together with its passage, by lunchtime.

The supreme council members will then reply to points raised during the debates. Dr Mahathir will be the last to speak.