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Mahathir-gathering

DON'T HOLD LARGE GATHERINGS FOR UMNO ELECTION CAMPAIGN, SAYS PM

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KUALA LUMPUR, Aug. 16 (Bernama) -- ^{RB}UMNO ^Dpresident Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today advised party members against holding large gatherings for campaigning in the run up to the party elections in November.

Large assemblies for campaigning was sure to involve use of a lot of money, he said.

"If there is no money how is it possible to hold a big gathering?" he told reporters after opening the National Competitiveness Forum jointly organised by the Malaysian Business Council and the International Trade and Industry Ministry here.

Dr Mahathir, who is Prime Minister, was asked to comment on the holding of large gatherings to campaign for the party elections in November.

Last Saturday, a closed-door gathering on the theme "Towards Malay Unity" was held at the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC) attended by about 7,000 people comprising staff of government departments and agencies under the Agriculture and Rural Development ministries, members of youth organisations and UMNO. -- more

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Those who spoke on current issues in UMNO at the gathering which lasted more than two-and-a-half hours were UMNO vice-presidents Datuk Abdullah Haji Ahmad Badawi and Datuk Seri Sanusi Junid, a Pahang State Executive Councillor Datuk Adnan Yaakob and Gaya UMNO division deputy head Bandi Pilo, who represented Sabah UMNO Liaison Committee deputy chairman Tun Datu Mustapha Datu Harun.

"So, I hope all groups will not organise large gatherings... it is adequate to hold small ones," said Dr Mahathir.

He was also asked to comment on allegations made by several UMNO leaders recently on use of money to fish for votes with the approach of the party elections.

Among those who made the allegations were Abdullah and UMNO Supreme Council member and Law Minister, Datuk Syed Hamid Albar.

Describing the use of money in politics as unhealthy, Dr Mahathir said the practice did occur in the country but it was not as serious as in some countries where it forced a change in government. -- more

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"Money politics in this country is not too serious yet but it can become serious. All diseases start from small, it's like a thin wedge, it will increase," he added.

As far as possible all groups should avoid using money in political activities, he said.

The use of money in politics had no end because if one gave RM10, another would give RM11 and if one party gave RM12, another would give RM20. The amount given would continue to rise because it won't satisfy people, he added.

Asked if UMNO had a mechanism to curb money politics, Dr Mahathir said: "We give advice but we do not have an Anti-Corruption Agency in the party. Sometimes we expose it so that UMNO members would not respond to money politics. -- more

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He said, however, UMNO had a disciplinary committee which would keep a watch on use of money in politics.

Dr Mahathir was also asked about allegations that government machinery like the Community Services Department (KEMAS) and the National Civics Bureau being used in the campaigning for the UMNO elections.

He said no one in UMNO was allowed to use government machinery to campaign for party elections.

"We can use government machinery to defend the government but not to defend any individual in the government," he added. -- Bernama

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