

Dr Mahathir proposes amendments to Umno constitution

End to money politics

By Farush Khan, (f)
Syed Nadzri and
Jeffrey Ramayah

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat — Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, reacting to widespread criticism against money politics, has proposed that its constitution be amended to eradicate the practice.

The Prime Minister said he was willing to propose that a candidate in a party election be disqualified if three members could prove beyond doubt that they had been offered money in exchange for votes.

Winding up the debate at the end of the three-day general assembly at the Putra World Trade Centre here today, Dr Mahathir said a candidate who used government machinery for campaigning would also be disqualified.

He then asked delegates to raise their hands if they agreed to the proposal, to which almost all of them reacted positively.

Dr Mahathir's pledge that he was willing to do everything possible to put a stop to money politics was greeted with applause and cheers by the delegates.

He later told a Press conference that an extraordinary general meeting would be held to debate and approve the amendments. But before that, he said, the legal implications and applicability of the proposal would be studied.

He said delegates were satisfied with the elections but expressed their dissatisfaction over the use of money in the campaigning.

"My opinion is that their worry is genuine and that

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they accepted my proposal that we eliminate money politics," he said.

Deputy-president Anwar Ibrahim and Umno secretary-general Datuk Mohamed Rahmat were also present at the Press conference.

Asked whether he was aware that his proposal could be used to sabotage candidates, Dr Mahathir said reports received would be thoroughly investigated before action could be taken.

In his speech, Dr Mahathir said he was more worried about the influence of money politics at the divisional level.

"My bigger worry is about divisional elections. If the divisions are split through the use of money, the party will face problems when fielding candidates for the general election because the candidate comes from that division.

"We need unity at national and divisional levels. The divisions must be solidly united because candidates for general elections will come from that level."

He said that he had made a study of the trend in the party elections and was quite satisfied with the results. Many incumbents were retained, with only four new faces elected.

He believed that those who were reported to have resorted to the use of money in their campaigns did not get the support they had wanted.

"We know who they are, but they did not win. Delegates took pens, calculators and other things but did not

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elect them."

On the other hand, he said, people like Datuk Dr Hamid Othman and Tan Sri Wan Mokhtar Ahmad, who were not active (in their campaigns), were supported.

He was happy that the assembly had attracted so many members, giving those from different parts of the country the chance to meet.

"It also shows that Malays have a deep interest in politics. If we lose this interest, we will become a weak race. Politics has always given strength to the Malays."

Using the same analogy, he said leaders too would become weak if they had few followers who could provide the support.

"We have to realise that unity in the party is significant. The more members the party has, the stronger it is."

Dr Mahathir, however, said it was unavoidable that a crisis sometimes occurred in a party.

"In the management of a party, there will be times when factionalism occurs because of a difference in opinion which can cause a rift in the party.

"We practise democracy which provides for the freedom of expression. Therefore, we are open to the dangers of a split. We also have to ensure that the party has good leaders, although none can be at the helm forever."

He said the transitional process of the party leadership would have an impact which might cause tensions in the party.

"If we don't face this effectively, the party may be split and become weak."

He said if in a party leadership contest, the loser decided to leave the party with his supporters and the winner was left with just a portion of the original members, surely the party would be less powerful.

"And in the next contest, if the same thing happens, then the original party will be left with maybe a quarter of the members and subsequently one-eighth.

"Logically, if the process continues, the party will be wiped out if we don't know how to practise democracy properly.

"But thank God, although our party has gone through some trying times, it is still effective. In fact, it has grown in strength."

Dr Mahathir said Umno was a very strong party today and that it could go through an election process unscathed.

"Although there are a few who are dissatisfied, Umno is still united and as powerful as ever."

He also congratulated those who were elected into office at this year's assembly.

"I won uncontested (as party president). But I realise that there must be some who had wanted a contest or who did not agree that I continue at the helm.

"There has to be. They are humans. That's why I have to be very cautious. I realise that I cannot thump my chest and be proud that I have won uncontested.

"I realise that I can only be here if I deliver the goods,

that is, if I carry out my duties as expected. I will try to do this to the best of my ability."

Dr Mahathir also reminded the members to help instil Islamic political values in Umno.

"Islamic political values can bring success. But sadly, these values are hardly found in the political culture of Muslims," he said, adding that this was one reason why many Muslim countries were not successful.

Replying to points raised by certain delegates that Umno members had to be a little *kurang ajar* (uncouth) at times, Dr Mahathir said the *kurang ajar* culture was first advocated by former deputy president Datuk Musa Hitam.

"This is not what we want. We don't have to be *kurang ajar*. It's not our culture. We can achieve success without having to be *kurang ajar*."

"We can be firm without being *kurang ajar*. We only need to instil in ourselves good values and habits."

He reminded delegates that changes, as advocated by some members, should always be for the better.

Dr Mahathir also called for efforts to strengthen Bahasa Malaysia.

"To promote the language, we have to progress as a race because the success of Bahasa Malaysia depends on the success of Malays as a race."

On the 10 grassroots votes given to president and deputy president, he said delegates had approved this provision.