

17 AUG 1997

Mahathir-Culture

DR MAHATHIR WANTS MEMBERS TO REALLY APPRECIATE UMNO CULTURE

KOTA KINABALU, Aug 17 (Bernama) -- Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today party members should truly appreciate the Umno culture which, despite the changes to suit the times, will continue to uphold unity, racial tolerance and a feeling of responsibility to the people.

He said that if negative practices like corruption, money politics and practices which do not bring progress were allowed to become part of the party culture, it would be difficult to rid the party of them later.

Whatever progress that had been achieved would come to nought if Umno members accepted and practised bad ways like corruption and drug addiction, he said when opening the Sabah Umno convention, here.

The prime minister, who spoke without a text for about an hour before over 3,000 people comprising Umno delegates and members and Sabah Barisan National component party leaders, said Umno had proven that it could bring progress to the country.

"Hence, Umno is strong and that is why the party has continued to helm the government since pre-Independence days and remained strong 40 years after independence," he said.

Stressing the need for the members to remain united, he related how Umno was able to consolidate the spirit and energy of the Malays in opposing the Malayan Union during the British rule.

"Because they feared losing their rights, for the first time they (the Malays) realised that they were one race. Before that, they were Kedahans, Kelantanese, Johoreans, state people...(they) spoke different dialects and were loyal to their respective rulers and did not think of themselves as one race," he said.

As a result, the Malay states were colonised one by one and when the Siamese attacked Kedah, for example, the Perak people did not think it was a Malay problem but regarded it as the problem of Kedahans, he said.

Dr Mahathir said: "Where previously our culture was narrow, confined to the respective states, now we could form a culture that could bring success and we could oppose the British until the idea of the Malayan Union had to be dropped.

"If we had tried to hold on to the old culture of trying to fight the British individually, we would have been swallowed one by one," he said.

He said the theme of the convention "Towards Appreciating the Umno Culture", was important and meaningful because "we want Umno to have one culture, we do not want Umno to have a culture that differs from place to place or from state to state."

Although in the peninsula there were state Umno which were parochial, the spirit of cooperation continued to be practised and that was what made Umno strong to enable it to continue lead the Barisan Nasional, he said.

The prime minister also drew comparisons between the style and culture of present and past leaders.

"The old way is different from now because previously there were no rewards. If (one) wanted to become a leader, he had to fork out his own money, must be prepared to sacrifice because there are no returns from the leadership," he said.

It was very difficult to find leaders then because they had to make sacrifices out of love for the religion, race and country, he said.

"Now it's different. Previously we did not jostle to become leaders.

Previously we coaxed people to become leaders, now there is no need to coax...now the candidates abound, if not allowed to contest, they will join other parties," he said in jest.

"This is how the culture has changed, but luckily, although it has changed, one thing, unity, remains," he added.

Dr Mahathir also said that Umno needed leaders who were not only popular but efficient because the party must be represented by people with a sense of responsibility to the people.

He also reminded members of the danger of slandering, citing as an example a recent report in the Harakah newspaper which claimed that he (Dr Mahathir) was close to being an apostate over the issue of three women who were arrested for taking part in a beauty contest.

"What right has it to say that I am nearly an apostate. But the slander was hurled, the accusation made and for those who do not check (the facts), they may accept it (as true). In Umno we do not want to slander or resort to any means that does not bring progress," he said. -- BERNAMA

JS JK