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Party members urged to hold on to idealism for survival

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - Umno should hold on to its idealism if it is to survive and continue with its struggles, an academician told a forum in conjunction with the party's 51st anniversary celebration today.

Universiti Malaya's history department Professor Madya Mahadzir Mohd Khir said Umno would be destroyed if members forgot its ideals which were based on religion, race and the country.

Mahadzir said the lack of idealism in the party's members could lead to them forgetting what the party stood for and might in turn breed corruption and abuse of power.

He also quoted a Malay proverb "Biar mati anak jangan mati adat" which he described as advice to discard members who went against the party's ideals.

"All Umno members are friends and brothers but once a member steps out of line, he becomes the party's foe," Mahadzir told a crowd of 1,000 at the "Unraveling of Umno's history: Success and Challenges" forum.

The forum held in conjunction with the party anniversary celebrations and was attended by party president and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, his deputy Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail and other Umno members.

It was chaired by Utusan Malaysia Group editor-in-chief Johan Jaafar with panel members comprising veteran journalist Tan Sri A. Samad Ismail, former Umno secretary-general Tan Sri Mustapha Jabar and Mahadzir.

On a lighter note, Mahadzir said leaders in general had their own strengths and weaknesses while citing Dr Mahathir as an example of a leader with a major weakness.

"Dr Mahathir has only one weakness. But it is a major weakness. His weakness is nobody can speculate his moves. Nobody can predict what he's going to do," he said to the laughter of the crowd.

Commenting on Mahadzir's discussions on idealism and ideologies, Johan suggested that Umno Youth hold another forum to discuss the subject at length.

Earlier, Samad said the party must remain flexible and pragmatic in its future approach, if it wants to remain as the leading mass movement in the country,

"The willingness of past Umno leaders to accept other parties, headed by the different communities as partners, is the basis of the country we have today," he said.

Samad said Umno leaders must also be receptive to new ideas and willing to accept constructive criticism.

He said although Umno members were now more affluent than in the past, they still possessed most of the idealism and spirit of members during the party's formation and its struggle for independence.

Samad said Umno members must continue to look at the past, not for nostalgia, but as a reminder of what the party stood for, as a guide for the future.

Mustapha recounted the birth of Umno following a meeting at the Sultan Sulaiman Club in March, 1946.

He said during the three-day meeting, which was attended by 171 delegates from 41 associations, it was recommended that a single party be established to unite the Malays.

Mustapha said it was after the meeting that Umno was established on May 11, although initially the party was referred to as United Malays Organisation.

He said the word "national" was later included on the advice of nationalist Pendeta Za'ba, as it would reflect the party's role as a mass movement.

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