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Reject leaders who deviate, says PM

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KOTA KINABALU, Sun. - Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has reminded party members to abide by Umno's time-honoured culture and reject leaders who deviate from it.

Umno's culture, he said, was one which emphasised party struggle and safeguarding the interests of all races, rejecting parochialism and the practice of identifying members with their home States.

"If there are leaders from the peninsula trying to promote a completely different culture, they should be rejected," the Prime Minister said when opening the Sabah Umno convention at the Shangri-La Tanjung Aru resort.

The convention will begin tomorrow with a keynote address by the State liaison chief Datuk Osu Sukam.

The convention's 1,300 delegates will discuss three resolutions on politics, economy and development.

Also present were Barisan Nasional secretary-general Datuk Mohamed Rahmat and representatives from State BN component parties.

Dr Mahathir said Umno represented the people and was responsible for solving their problems.

"Our culture is to benefit the people and the nation," he said. "Therefore, Umno members must continue to uphold these good values."

Dr Mahathir reiterated his call to eradicate corruption before it became part of the party's culture.

Corruption, he said, had never been part of Umno before but now people were saying that money politics was part of Umno's culture.

When the (Umno) election was approaching, there were those who started to get sponsorship to perform the Umrah (small Haj) or to get small calculators, he said.

"This has to be stopped," he said. "If corruption is the norm, then it will be impossible to stop it."

Dr Mahathir, however, was thankful that the situation had not reached that level.

He conceded that it was not easy for leaders to show that they were clean although they must be seen to be clean.

"In politics, people defame others and when this happens, it is difficult to accept the leadership of a particular person," he said.

"There are some who say 'if you want to win, come to us because we have a lot of votes'."

"This, too, should be avoided," he said in reference to Sabah Umno, which has the largest party membership of over 35,000 from 20 divisions.

Dr Mahathir said Umno's struggle during its formative years was different as it was not rewarded.

Umno's second president Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra even had to spend his own money to pursue his political struggle.

"Because of the situation, it was very difficult to find one who was willing to become a leader so much so that one had to be coaxed into becoming one," he said.

"Now, there are plenty of people who scramble to become leaders and if not given the opportunity, will even cry, or worse, defect to other parties."

Dr Mahathir said loyalty to Umno must remain alive because it gave strength and meaning to its struggle.

Because of Umno's moderate stand, he said Malaysia was stable and

development could be carried out.

"Umno will also remain as a mass movement where everybody can join," he said.

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