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Full endorsement for Dr M's speech

DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's speech at the opening of the Umno Extraordinary General Meeting yesterday received full support from delegates who agreed that party unity was paramount and that amendments to the constitution were needed to reinforce democracy in the party.

They also agreed that leadership qualities and credibility were important when choosing a leader.

Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak said anyone who wanted to become a leader in the party must not only meet these criteria but also have the will to carry on Umno's agenda.

Another vice-president, Datuk Seri Abdullah Badawi, said the president's speech was meant as an advice for members to put the party ahead of self.

He said Umno's strength came from its unity, therefore it was crucial that the spirit be maintained.

Supreme council member Datuk Ibrahim Ali described Dr Mahathir's speech as extraordinary, which "directs delegates to ensure party interests above all".

He said the president's speech clearly struck at the root of the problem.

"Dr Mahathir has proven once again that the interest of party and nation overrides self-interest."

Ibrahim said that the president's speech had also proved that he was "above board".

Supreme council member Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz described Dr Mahathir's speech as a reminder to Umno members to insist on the "character" of their leaders when selecting candidates in the upcoming party elections.

She said it was pointless for the party to amend its constitution if party members did not heed the president's advice and instead succumbed to money politics.

"We must ensure that there will be no factions in the party as they have undeniably existed before."

On several Wanita Umno leaders' recent statements supporting her candidacy in the upcoming party elections, Rafidah said the time was not yet proper for her to make any comment on the subject.

"I do not know what is in the hearts of those who said they will support me, only God knows," she said.

Wanita Umno chief Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman was among those who had expressed support for Rafidah's candidacy.

Another supreme council member, Tan Sri Ramli Ngah Talib who is Perak Menteri Besar, said the amendments to the constitution reflected the changing times the party was going through.

He said the amendments, which covered certain loopholes in the constitution, did not mean that the democratic process within the party had been "weak" in the past, but were meant to strengthen the party.

"What we did today was to fortify democracy (in the party) since democracy can ensure national security and economic development," he said.

Ramli said from time to time, parts of the constitution needed to be amended to suit the changing times.

"It's just to make sure that the party's constitution is dynamic, alive and suitable for the needs of the members."

Acting Umno Youth head Datuk Hishamuddin Hussein said Dr Mahathir's call for Umno to defend the country against foreign domination was very

relevant especially at the present time.

"His speech has alerted the delegates and leaders that there is no other avenue to continue with our struggle except through Umno.

"Disunity among the Malays will only split the people and has no benefit."

Delegate from Kemaman, Terengganu, Dr Ramli Taib said members would realise the message the party president was trying to get across.

Taking a cue from excerpts of Dr Mahathir's speech, Ramli said party members should realise the spirit behind those words.

"We cannot hide the fact that there has been a certain amount of friction within the party following developments last September.

"But the contents of the party president's speech say it all...referring to the statement on politics, there is no lasting friendship, neither are there permanent enemies. That is the message."

Ramli said while speculation was rife on the contenders for the party's top post next year, the president's speech clearly stated that members should place the party's and nation's interest above all.

Gua Musang division chief Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah said Dr Mahathir's speech should be used by party members as a guide to strengthen the party in its effort to maintain the support of the people.

Tengku Razaleigh who was the former president of the now-defunct Parti Melayu Semangat 46, otherwise known as S46, said those who would be chosen to contest party posts or otherwise should carefully analyse the president's speech and use it as a guide to avoid friction within the party's ranks.

"Those who are not chosen in the next party election must especially be careful to avoid being influenced by certain quarters intent on weakening and splitting the party."

S46 former deputy president Datuk Dr Rais Yatim said Dr Mahathir's speech made it clear that personal qualities of a person should be put aside when choosing a leader.

"He made it clear that we have imbibed the true democratic processes which are not based on the creation of a personality cult or a culture that idolises a particular person."

He said the choice of a leader should be based on his performance record and credibility.

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