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Rapped for not using party channels (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad won a thumping endorsement of his leadership after he delivered a long closing speech during which he ribbed and chided delegates and emotionally cajoled them to suppress their self-interest and work single-mindedly to preserve party unity.

He branded those who speak behind the back of others as unity wreckers and appealed to leaders and members to use official channels to express their grouses instead of washing the party's perceived dirty linen in public.

To loud applause and noisy expressions of approval, he chided a number of leaders at all levels, lambasted some members of the supreme council and named Youth leader Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi as one member who preferred to go public with his grouses.

The Prime Minister said he was saddened that, in the face of allegations of cronyism and nepotism against the Government, he did not hear anyone speaking up on the matter during the supreme council meetings.

If the proper use of these channels was disregarded, it would bog down the smooth running of the party and ruin the maximum advantages that could be gained, he said.

He also gave a run-down of the order of things in the party to remind members of the channels available to members to voice their grouses.

"It is very important that we use proper channels because it brings benefit. If we don't, the administration of the party cannot be smooth," he said in an adjournment speech at the end of the three-day Umno assembly at the Putra World Trade Centre.

The speech, which lasted about one hour 40 minutes, touched on this issue amidst allegations of cronyism and nepotism in the award of government projects. Foremost among those who made the allegations was Ahmad Zahid who spoke on the matter after a convention in Johor last month and again when opening the Youth movement's assembly on Thursday.

Ahmad Zahid's remarks, which were echoed by several other Umno Youth leaders, triggered a counter-attack by Dr Mahathir on Friday, who had since released several lists containing names of companies and individuals who had been awarded privatisation projects and shares.

Taking off from there, Dr Mahathir said Umno, with a 50-year history behind it, had a clear-cut order of things with the branches, divisions and State liaison committees having their specific roles to play and where members' voices could be heard.

Then there was the supreme council, the highest policy-making forum. "The supreme council membership is not a mere label to be pinned on the chest. We should derive the proper benefits from the supreme council for the betterment of our party."

He was saddened that in this regard, the supreme council was not used as a forum to voice out such serious matters as allegations of cronyism, nepotism and corruption.

He himself had to read about the allegations of improper implementation of government policies in the newspapers.

"Supreme council meetings are serious affairs and there have been occasions when these meetings stretched from 9pm to 4am until even reporters waiting for their outcomes had to give up."

The party president gave a rundown of the procedure of such meetings

where he said all 42 members were given a chance to speak.

A supreme council meeting starts with the do'a (prayers), followed by remarks from the president, adoption of the minutes of the previous meeting, matters arising from the minutes and the various committee reports starting with one from the deputy president, the Menteris Besar, the Youth leader, the Wanita leader and the various bureaus.

"Everyone is given a place in the agenda and there is no question of anyone not being given a chance to speak."

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