

13 DEC 1998

Umno-Reaction

UMNO NEEDS LEADERS WHO CAN PURSUE PARTY AGENDA, SAYS NAJIB

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 13 (Bernama) -- Umno needs leaders who can pursue the party's agenda and not their personal agenda, vice-president Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said today.

To fulfil the party's struggle, a leader must have the ability, credibility and good personality, he said.

Prime Minister and Umno President Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had said this explicitly in his opening address, he said.

"Those aspiring to become leaders in Umno must practise a leadership style that is acceptable to the majority," he said when commenting on Dr Mahathir's policy speech at the opening of the Special Umno General Assembly at the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC) here today.

In his speech, Dr Mahathir said a leader must be elected based on his personality, ability and other qualities befitting of a leader.

On the proposed amendments allowing political organisations and individuals to become associate members, Najib said Umno would also offer the opportunity to those outside who wished to cooperate with the party.

"We will offer a chance to those, who for certain reasons cannot become Umno member, but want to cooperate with the party on condition they subscribe to Umno's objectives and struggles," said Najib, who is Education Minister.

However, these people would not be accorded the rights enjoyed by Umno members.

"We are only providing provisions for them to become associate members and cooperate with Umno. For instance, they can attend Umno meetings as observers and participate in party activities," he said.

As to whether Umno would open its membership to non-malays, Najib said it was for the Supreme Council to decide.

He, however, said Umno had opened its doors to all Bumiputeras.

Another vice-president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said what Dr Mahathir said should be taken as an advice and guide for the party elections next year.

"It is a timely reminder for us to place party interests above all and not be carried away by any groups or individuals," he said.

He said Umno's unity must be paramount in the hearts and minds of those aspiring to contest for party positions.

Asked to comment on the amendments to the party constitution, Abdullah, who is Foreign Minister, hoped they would help curb money politics.

"The constitution amended time and again will serve no purpose if there is no attitudinal change among party members to give priority to Umno's struggles and unity," he said.

Acting Umno Youth chief Datuk Hishammuddin Tun Hussein said efforts must be made to ensure contests for party positions in next year's party elections be carried out in a friendly atmosphere.

He did not want to see calls to have "friendly" contests remain mere rhetorics.

"Candidates offering themselves for party positions must steadfastly held to the "friendly" contest concept," said Hishammuddin, who is Deputy Primary Industries Minister.

Asked whether the youth movement had proposed suggestions to the Supreme Council to prevent overzealous politicking in next year's party polls, he said the movement had its own way of conducting the election for

its office bearers.

"I feel there are no problems in the movement to find an amicable way to conduct the election without resulting in rifts," he said.

An Umno veteran Datuk Dr Rais Yatim said Umno members should not be obsessed with a particular leader as democracy does not advocate the culture of idolising a leader.

He said democracy would be reality if Umno do away with leader-worshipping.

Umno secretary-general Datuk Seri Sabbaruddin Chik said the constitutional amendments would be forwarded to the Registrar of Societies for approval two weeks from now.

-- BERNAMA

TEAM RON TS