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Umno - assemblies

YOUTH AND WANITA ASSEMBLIES SET EASY-DOES-IT MOOD

(A news analysis)

KUALA LUMPUR, June 18 (Bernama) -- It is akin to, to quote a Malay proverb, trying to remove a strain of hair from a heap of flour.

That is how political analysts described the easy-does-it-mood set at today's annual assembly of the Umno youth wing preceding the party's general assembly tomorrow.

They said delegates to the assembly were able "to remove the hair without snapping it and at the same time without messing up the flour."

Analysts said the much-speculated proverbial scenario painted by foreign political observers of a barge capsizing and its crew being snapped up by sharks did not take place.

What prevailed was common sense and rationality.

Fears that the Umno Youth expressed demand that the party leadership deal with nepotism and cronyism would only divide the party were unfounded, analysts said.

The party remained seemingly cohesive and still solidly united notwithstanding such fears.

While it explicitly demanded curbs to nepotism and cronyism so as to maintain public confidence in Umno, the youth wing chief Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi pledged undivided support for Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's leadership.

Ahmad Zahid said the movement would continue supporting the government and its criticisms of government weaknesses did not mean it was out to elevate or bring down any leader.

"My vice chief Datuk Hishammuddin (Tun Hussein) and I as well as the Umno Youth executive committee continue to support the leadership. In fact we're not interested in wasting our time colluding with those out to see Umno destroyed," he said.

"As for the Umno Youth, we need a bridge linking us with the leadership and in this hall we have Mokhzani Mahathir (son of the prime minister and party president) who is Umno Youth's strong bridge with the leadership," said Ahmad Zahid to the applause of the 495 delegates.

In fact, the party deputy president himself Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, who the foreign media had made to appear as no longer seeing eye-to-eye with Dr Mahathir, urged both the youth and women's wings to give full backing to the party leadership and stick to party ideals in facing the country's current economic problems.

Anwar, when simultaneously opening the assemblies of both party wings earlier, had instead surprised foreign political observers by reminding Umno Youth to learn from the mistakes of allowing factional politics to split Umno in 1987.

While the political pundits may have made their own conclusions about today's Umno Youth assembly, it was glaring that the party members have chosen to put Umno and Malay interests above all else.

Asked to comment on this, Umno vice-president and Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said Anwar's address to both the party wings today would go a long way towards consolidating party unity which is vital to Malaysia's political stability and economic recovery.

Abdullah reckoned that the issue of nepotism and cronyism raised by Ahmad Zahid did not at all create tension although "certain parties would like that to happen".

Delegates debating these issues have obviously taken note of Dr

Mahathir's advice at yesterday's pre-council presidential briefing for them to speak responsibly and not to undermine party unity.

-- BERNAMA

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