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Dr M: Be mindful of party unity

Sarban Singh; Marhalim Abas

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today told the party's Youth leaders selected for Gerak Gempur, a motivational programme for members, to be mindful of party unity and be wary of attempts to disunite them.

Dr Mahathir also reminded them they would be wrong to think that the Malays would continue to prosper if they were divided.

He gave the advice to the Youth members before they departed to their respective destinations to take part in the four-day programme tailored to enhance their knowledge on current issues and in preparation to face the coming general election.

A total of 1,943 Umno Youth members would take part in the programme to be held at nine Kem Bina Negara sites in Kaki Bukit (Perlis), Ulu Kenas (Perak), Ulu Sepri (Negri Sembilan), Gunung Pulai (Johor), Besut (Terengganu), Pasir Panjang (Penang), Meru (Selangor), Alor Gajah (Malacca), Maran (Pahang) and Kulim Bandar Baru (Kedah).

They were selected from Umno divisions throughout the country.

Among the programmes to be held include group dynamics and discussion. Each group would also be required to submit findings from their respective camps.

Today's briefing was held behind closed doors.

"I have to explain these things to the youth members because they were born after the country gained Independence and as such, they do not understand what it feels like to be colonised or the meaning of living without power in your own country.

"As they are inexperienced, it is important for me to remind them on our (Umno's) past experiences. This way they will be more responsible."

Dr Mahathir said Malays who had been prosperous since Independence, should not take things for granted.

"We want to tell them they cannot take things for granted. If you have a hung Parliament and without a strong party to rule, the people will not have the good life they are enjoying but will instead suffer socially, economically and politically.

"They should value the struggle that was launched by Umno. They think that even if they are divided their safety will be guaranteed and that they will continue to be prosperous as they are now.

"It is important for me to remind them that without Umno they will not be where they are now and without Umno, their future will be blighted."

Dr Mahathir said this way, members would be able to put aside all their differences and give priority to party unity and to strengthen Umno.

Also present at today's briefing were Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who now assumed the duties of the party's deputy president, secretary-general Datuk Khalil Yaakob, several Menteris Besar, party veterans, and Wanita and Youth members.

Asked whether there was any split in Umno ranks, Dr Mahathir said there was not.

"Some have left the party because they have failed to understand the true spirit of Umno. Some of those who left came from Abim or other organisations.

"Those still in Umno today are its genuine members who understand and appreciate the party's struggle.

"In fact when Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah (former Finance Minister) left

Umno, there were some Umno Supreme Council members who went with him. But this time, there aren't many...they number very small," he said.

Asked how many members had been expelled or had left the party since the sacking of former deputy president Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Dr Mahathir said they were between 300 and 400.

Asked on a foreign report that Malaysian students overseas would not vote for the present leadership, Dr Mahathir said: "There are some but generally most of them will still vote for us. They are indebted and grateful to the Government for the scholarships given to them which had enabled them to pursue their studies.

"Only a small number of those who have been influenced might not vote for us," he said.

Asked whether predictions by certain quarters that Barisan Nasional would lose the northern States in the coming election, Dr Mahathir said: "Each time there is an election, there are always predictions. However, these predictions have always been wrong."

To another question, Dr Mahathir said he would be visiting all States in the near future to have meet-the-people sessions.

"I have visited Sabah, Selangor and Johor. I will be visiting the other States very soon," he said adding that the response from the people during his visits had been overwhelming.

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