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Khalil-membership

OPPOSITION CLAIMS NOT TRUE, UMNO MEMBERSHIP ON THE RISE - KHALIL

KUALA LUMPUR, June 15 (Bernama) -- Umno has 2,777,086 members todate, contrary to claims by opposition parties especially PAS that many Umno members have joined PAS, Umno secretary-general Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob said today.

" If there is a trend of Umno members deserting the party, it is not visible," he said when asked on the number of Umno members said to have ditched the party since the expulsion of former deputy president Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim on Sept 3 last year.

Briefing the media on the four-day Umno General Assembly beginning Thursday at the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC), here, he said, Umno membership continued to increase despite recent incidents.

After Anwar's sacking from government and Umno, PAS and newly-formed Parti Keadilan Nasional (Keadilan) led by Anwar's wife Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Ismail had claimed that there was an exodus of Umno members to their parties.

Asked whether the members might have left the party without informing their branch leaders, he said they must notify the party if they wished to quit.

" They will still be considered as Umno members if they failed to do so," said Khalil, who is Information Minister.

He said he believed no Umno member would want to leave the party just because he sympathised with someone.

He said he would disclose later the number of people embracing Umno after Anwar was expelled.

Khalil also said Umno leaders would counter one by one opposition allegations against the party at the assembly.

" If no explanation is given, many Umno members will be confused as they will feel the party has no reasonable grounds to reply to the allegations," he said.

The explanations would also enable delegates to convey to members at the grassroots on the actual political and economic situation, he said.

Khalil also said Umno headquarters would distribute pamphlets in the form of booklets to delegates as the party's strategy to refute opposition claims particularly by PAS.

Among the pamphlets are "Mengenai Sikap PAS" (To Understand PAS' Attitude) and "Parti Islam: Antara Realiti dan Fantasi." (Islamic Party: Between Reality And Fantasy).

On the public forum to be held on Thursday night as a prelude to the General Assembly, Khalil said several speakers had been invited to explain various issues including branding of Umno members as infidels by PAS.

He, however, declined to disclose the speakers' names.

On the "surprise" to be made by Prime Minister and Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the assembly, Khalil said: "I cannot say it. He is holding the trump card."

-- BERNAMA

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