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Mahathir-Students

UMNO CLUBS IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS NOT APPROPRIATE, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, June 16 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today it is not appropriate to set up Umno clubs at local institutions of higher learning because the government wants the students to concentrate on their studies.

He said that if Umno clubs like those overseas were allowed to be set up at local tertiary institutions, he believed that other parties would also want to set up their own clubs and such a move would only distract the students from their studies because they would be "fighting over politics only".

"Our Umno clubs overseas have no powers whatsoever. There are also clubs of other parties (overseas)," he told reporters after a pre-council briefing for Umno delegates on the eve of the 53rd Umno general assembly beginning at the Putra World trade centre, here, tomorrow.

He was asked on the possibility of allowing local tertiary students to set up Umno clubs like those overseas.

Dr Mahathir said the government's intention in disallowing students in the country to be involved in politics did not mean that these students were not capable politically.

"We want them to concentrate on their studies. It's not that we consider them incapable but they have a long future ahead of them," he said.

Under the Universities and University Colleges Act students are forbidden to be involved in politics.

Dr Mahathir said that Umno, as the backbone of the government, would continue to approach university students to explain their role as students.

"When they are successful, they can take up politics. While in the university, the people are paying for them to study, not to indulge in other activities to the extent of affecting their academic performance," he said.

The people were prepared to pay because they felt responsible for the next generation, he added. (Higher education in Malaysia is highly subsidised by the government and poor students are given scholarships or loans).

Dr Mahathir said although Umno received the support of the people, he felt that the young generation was not so close with the party.

"We found some of the young not close with Umno because we have made a mistake. Because we wanted them to concentrate on their studies, we did not bother them with political issues. But the opposition parties used the opportunity to meet the university students until they (students) hate Umno."

He said the students were incited and their thinking moulded to hate Umno.

"They (opposition parties) incite (the students) not to be grateful to those who help them and instead to hit out at them."

He also said: "People who have left Umno are people who have never really been hard Umno members. They are people from outside with a hidden agenda, to join Umno with the hope that they can take over Umno."

"Those people who have left Umno, we are not losing anything. They have never been Umno members anyway," he said.

Dr Mahathir also criticised those who claimed that people who joined Umno had become rich.

"Lots of Umno people are very poor. Lots of members in my family are extremely poor. So I don't like that connotation that 'you join Umno to become rich'. But some people in Umno do become rich. I can name you many people who are not Umno members who are extremely rich including those who oppose Umno."

"So joining Umno does not ensure that you will become rich. You'll become rich only if you know how to make money for yourself and not because you are an Umno member. I can show you thousands of people, not Umno people, who have gained from the development of this country," he said.

Asked about his briefing for the delegates, Dr Mahathir said he commented on Umno's history and its fight for independence.

He also told them that Umno must always ensure that the people understood its struggle.

"We must ensure that the people are always close to us and vice versa," he added.

Asked whether he discussed preparations for the general election with the delegates, he said "no".

-- BERNAMA

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