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`Umno is confident of people's support'

Ramlan Said

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Umno is confident an election dry run being conducted now, will show the people are still behind the party, secretary-general Tan Sri Khalil Yaacob said today.

He said claims that support for the party was dwindling and many had left, were made by the Opposition to destabilise Umno and create doubt among members.

Khalil said results of the dry run, were expected to be submitted to the party's headquarters next week.

"The exercise is held to test both our election machinery's state of readiness and support from the electorate," he said after a management and disciplinary committee meeting chaired by vice-president and Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi at Menara Dato' Onn.

Khalil said if reports that scores of members had left Umno to join the Opposition were true, the party headquarters would have been notified.

"But this is not so. In fact, our membership has increased compared to the 2.7 million registered at the beginning of the year.

"Besides, we have also received many applications to set up new branches."

Khalil said Umno and the Barisan Nasional Government still enjoyed popular support as evident from the thousands of people who turned up at the various meet-the-people sessions with party president and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Asked to comment on the intention of the Alternative Front comprising Opposition parties to appoint Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim as Prime Minister if they were to win in the general election, Khalil said they were free to make such an arrangement.

"But whether this will turn into a reality, we let the people decide (in the election)," he said.

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