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Debate on amendments by party delegates 'polite but passionate'

DEBATE at the Umno special assembly, which is seeking delegates approval to make several amendments to the party constitution, was polite but passionate.

Most speakers said their States were supportive of the amendments as a whole. However, some highlighted issues relevant to their respective States.

The debate on the proposals took place in the morning after party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had delivered his keynote address.

Vice-president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin first presented the proposals, explaining the rationale for each proposed amendments.

Each representative was then given 10 minutes to present his State's stand on the amendments.

One speaker from each Umno State liaison committee was allowed to present his State's overall stand on the proposals.

They were noted to be generally supportive of the establishment of Puteri Umno, although differing opinions were registered on organisational details of the body.

Perlis Umno representative Abu Bakar Ismail focused his presentation on the amendment to make membership application an easier process.

"This amendment will not only add to our ranks, but enhance the quality of members which we will receive as well," he said.

Kedah representative Datuk Badaruddin Amiruddin delivered a rousing presentation which touched on the need for members to stand united.

This, he said, was important, especially in the forthcoming Lunas State by-election on Nov 29.

Badaruddin commended the supreme council for dropping its original proposal to extend the tenure of service for the supreme council and division heads to five years from the present three.

He humourously likened the term of service of Umno leaders to the process of nestling an egg.

"If we nestle the egg too long, I'm afraid the egg will suddenly become hard," he quipped, to the laughter of the delegates.

On a more serious note, Badaruddin urged that the accepted amendments be practised by members at all levels.

Badaruddin, who is the Kedah State Legislative Assembly Speaker, said that the Kedah Umno liaison committee supported the establishment of the proposed Puteri Umno.

He urged senior Wanita Umno members not to be apprehensive about Puteri Umno.

"Please don't be angry with Putri Umno," he said, "because Putri (daughters) means, after all, a movement of daughters to all of you."

Badaruddin, well known at past Umno assemblies for his amusing presentations laced with bawdy anecdotes and surreal stories, also highlighted the plight of Umno members at the grassroots.

Sometimes, he said, party directives, even those with the best of intentions, negatively affected ordinary members.

He cited the Government's repeated reminders that teachers who opposed the Government would face stiff action.

Badaruddin said there was a case in Kedah, where a student whose parents were Pas supporters submitted his homework in notebooks bearing a Pas

logo.

Kelantan representative Datuk Ahmad Rastom Ahmad Maher suggested that in future, any constitutional amendment exercise should be done after holding a special forum to gauge support and to understand the peculiarities of each other's situation.

Meanwhile, Ahmad Rastom said the biggest problem in Umno now was not its constitution, but excessive internal politicking.

He said this could be seen in the recurring problem of money politics, where candidates vying for party positions spent money to buy support.

"Candidates for party posts are swimming in money during the general assembly election," he said, "but come general elections they all claim to be very 'poor'."

On the party's stand as defenders of Islam, Ahmad Rastom said that many non-Umno Malays and Bumiputeras were puzzled as to where the party stood when it came to religion.

To correct his, he suggested that Umno, in future, should consider amending Article Three of the party's constitution relating to the foundation and objectives of the party.

No amendments to Article Three were proposed at the assembly.

Terengganu representative Datuk Paduka Abdul Rahman Bakar brought the delegates attention to proposed amendments in Article Five, relating to membership application.

The most notable amendment proposed under the Article was the one which states that "every Malay and Bumiputera has the right to register as an Umno member".

Abdul Rahman said the proposal was required due to numerous complaints that new applications sometimes took up to three years to be approved.

He also suggested that in the future, Umno should consider halving the current figures of divisional nominations required to enable a candidate to qualify to contest party leadership positions.

Penang Umno representative Datuk Abdul Latiff Mirasa commended the party for proposing to amend Article 6.3.4, which currently prohibits civil servants under the A category of service, to contest any party position.

Abdul Latiff said the amendment was necessary in order for the party to control the Government.

This, he added, was because Umno members had become "lackadaisical" when it comes to conducting programmes.

Abdul Latiff said they relied too much on Government agencies such as Kemas and National Unity departments.

"It is as if Umno members are not energetic enough to mobilise themselves in community service programmes," he said.

Citing an example of Umno members' excessive dependence on Government, Abdul Latiff pointed out how the party was not doing enough to equip and prepare the Malays for the knowledge-economy or K-economy.

He also questioned why the distribution of computers under the Employees' Provident Fund account withdrawal scheme was only limited to posts offices, and not at Umno branches as well.

Abdul Latiff also urged Umno's supreme council to engage in further efforts to convince the people that "Umno is Islam, and Islam is Umno".

He suggested that an ulamak advisory body be established by the party to persuade the country's ulamak that "they have a place in Umno at all levels in the party".

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