

18 NOV 2000

Mahathir-Corruption

DR MAHATHIR ASKS UMNO MEMBERS TO REJECT GRAFT

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 18 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister and Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad again cautioned party members that corruption and money politics can destroy Umno and asked them to expose those offering bribes.

He said if they cared for their race, Umno members should turn down all forms of bribery, including offers of overseas trips and to perform the Umrah, (the minor pilgrimage to Mekah).

In an emotion-packed address to the Umno special general assembly here today to amend the party's constitution, Dr Mahathir said: "Care for our race. Love our grandchildren. Reject corruption.

"Expose those giving bribes. Gather enough evidence and expose them."

As he paused several times trying to hold back tears, Dr Mahathir said: "For the sake of our race, reject everything that smells graft...if not our race will be disgraced and destroyed."

Dr Mahathir said that even by amending its constitution, Umno could not check corruption if the members themselves condone it.

Dr Mahathir also reminded Umno members that the party would face destruction, as did other long-established political parties, for failing to make appropriate changes and not getting used to new situations.

He said the proposed constitutional amendments sought to guarantee that the Umno cause would not be derailed by attitudinal changes taking place within the party and society.

Umno members, he said, should learn from history that great civilisations declined and disappeared because their enheritors lost the founding spirit of willingness to take on challenges, determination, selflessness and the willingness to die for a cause.

Dr Mahathir said Umno's great accomplishments in the 54 years of its existence and in the history of the Malays were still fragile.

"A slight touch may cause it to crack and break. Once broken, believe me, the Malays will come tumbling down too," said Dr Mahathir.

Dr Mahathir said the attitude and conduct of Umno members themselves would determine the continuity of the Malay civilisation built by Umno.

"As such it is vital that we ensure that Umno leaders and members do not behave as inheritors merely scrambling for positions but as nation-builders equally dedicated as Umno's founding fathers," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he was aware that the opposition would capitalise on Umno's efforts to rid itself of corruption and money politics to portray that Umno was graft-ridden.

In fact, he said corruption within Umno was not as bad as made out by the opposition because Umno members still regarded corruption as a crime and committing a corrupt practice would be shameful.

"The situation is still redeemable, God willing. However, a preventive approach is required to ward off such evil before it spreads and becomes part of our culture," Dr Mahathir said.

Dr Mahathir said if Umno accepted corruption as a normal practice, the party may get a president or a prime minister buying over the posts.

Many countries, upon gaining independence, could not be developed at all as the leaders pilfered and stashed away government funds abroad, he said.

"Umno can still honour its pledges to the people, to the Malays and the other Bumiputeras and to religion and the country," said Dr Mahathir to the

applause of the delegates.

He called on party members to sustain such capability to deliver the goods besides cleansing Umno of all malpractices, including corruption.

He said: "We've just progressed a little, We're still unsafe. The colonisers are awaiting. We already have traitors assisting them to re-colonise us."

"Just for little money and because we are hard up for positions, are we willing to sell off the Malays and the country?" he asked.

Dr Mahathir said if Umno were to continue furthering its cause, its younger members would have to bring in changes while the party elders should willingly give them the space.

Dr Mahathir said by Umno accepting younger members and leaders into its fold early, they would in turn be able to fully embrace the Umno cause.

However, he said, having incapable people to lead Umno would also weaken the Umno-led government.

"The consequence of having a disabled Umno leadership is a destroyed nation. In other words, Umno has to be preserved as only Umno has the policies and the approach that can develop the country besides redeeming racial and national pride dented for 450 years," he said.

The prime minister said no one had the right to stop Malays from joining Umno and described those attempting that as betraying Umno and the future of the Malays.

On the proposed establishment of Puteri Umno as an off-shoot of the party's women's wing, Dr Mahathir said it was not because there were obstacles to younger Malay women joining Wanita Umno.

"The party is much indebted to the women's wing and has no intention at all to weaken it with the establishment of Puteri Umno," he said.

The assembly then deliberated behind closed doors.

-- BERNAMA

MAM ZS MAI RYN