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Dr M: It's proof views are heard

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UMNO's readiness to amend the party's constitution is proof that it is receptive to views from all members irrespective of their positions, party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

"Members were given as much chance to provide feedback and even up to the last minute, we still accepted their views. Generally, the basis of the amendments was accepted by all."

The Prime Minister also said that each decision on the proposed amendments was agreed to overwhelmingly. Citing an example, he said there was a small group which was against the formation of Puteri Umno.

However, after a debate on the matter, the proposal on Puteri Umno, aimed at attracting young women to the party, received support from the majority of the 2,023 delegates.

Dr Mahathir also drew laughter from reporters when he said: "There were differences of opinion, but each proposal was agreed to with an overwhelming majority - unlike the US presidential race."

Dr Mahathir said this at a Press conference at the end of the one-day special assembly to amend Umno's constitution.

Asked what message he intended to give Malaysians with the special meeting considering that it was held about six months after the party's general assembly, he said: "Umno is very open and is open to all indigenous people and Malays."

"We are also not extremist in any way and our objectives are consistent with the needs of a multi-racial population."

He reiterated that Umno wanted more young people, both men and women, to join the party so that the people could better understand the party's objectives.

"No branch can reject any application to join the party. However, the branch can advise the supreme council to check the background of each potential member because we do not want anybody that is not suitable for the party."

Asked why the debate was held behind closed doors, Dr Mahathir said this was because it involved the party's internal problems.

On the decision not to table a proposal to extend the supreme council's tenure from three to five years, he said the delegates agreed that the council could postpone it up to 18 months if party polls were close to a general election.

"Delegates also took a moderate stance on this because if there were changes in the Umno leadership, it could have an adverse impact on the outcome of a general election."

Asked if he was disappointed that the tenure was not extended, he said: "I should not be ... it is not going to affect me."

On his repeated calls for members to reject money politics and corruption, he said: "Crimes are still committed even with laws that provide for the convicted to be hanged. Our punishment is very minimal - at the very most they will be expelled, not hanged."

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