

02/02/2000

Guidelines to ensure unity (HL)

Ramlan Said

SEPANG, Tues. - Guidelines on Umno party elections are not intended to stop anyone from contesting, party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

Rather, the Prime Minister said, it was to prevent unhealthy practices and intense campaigning that could cause a split in the party.

He said this was the reason behind the advice given by the supreme council that there should be no contest for the two top Umno posts and the proposed code of ethics for candidates.

"The supreme council is not trying to restrict anyone but experience has shown that a contest can lead to a split. Whoever wins will only get half the support and this means Umno's strength will continue to weaken," he told a press conference at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport on returning from a two-week vacation overseas.

Looking relaxed and cheerful, the Prime Minister also said reform, like not imposing any restriction on a contest as suggested by some quarters, would be pointless if it would only cause Umno to fragment and be weakened further.

The Prime Minister was asked about views (by some Umno members) that Umno should undergo reform and that too many restrictions and rules should not be placed pertaining to the party elections.

Asked why contests could lead to disunity, Dr Mahathir said many members and aspirants now placed their interests above those of the party.

"When they lose, they become frustrated and do things to destroy the party. It is also happening at the divisions. In the last general election, many members who were not satisfied about something, voted for the Opposition. The Opposition can never win only with votes of their supporters.

"So, what is the use of reform if Umno is fragmented after every contest and becomes less effective in the country's political scene."

Although experience had shown it to be true, Dr Mahathir said, the council could not do anything if members wished to see splinter parties formed by frustrated members, who might resort to the move after losing in the party elections.

"I believe Umno can still bring progress to the country and development to the Malays and the Bumiputeras. If this is no longer important but only to become party leaders and candidates, then it is up to them ... if this is what they term as reforms."

Responding to a suggestion that there was no need for a code of ethics as the party constitution was sufficient to deal with misconduct by candidates, Dr Mahathir said many did not adhere to it.

"There will be no problem if people can accept defeat. But now, losers get frustrated and leave Umno to form other parties."

Dr Mahathir advised members to stick to the party's struggles and not be preoccupied on who should become leaders. Asked whether the attitude of placing self-interest above those of the country and party prevailed because of the achievements and progress made by the Malays, Dr Mahathir said:

"Perhaps my views are already out of date but to me, the Malays are still not safe. If we place our interests above that of the nation and Umno, all our achievements so far will not only come to a halt, but will be destroyed.

"I do not think we are so strong now that we can do whatever we want ... that we are clever, have degrees that there is no need for politics anymore."

Asked on the formation of teams or running mates for the election, Dr Mahathir said the matter would be discussed by the council.

"I don't think it is right for me to comment anything on it now because it may influence the views of other people."

(END)