

18 NOV 2000

Mahathir-Satisfaction

UMNO NOW MORE OPEN, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 18 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has expressed satisfaction over the just-concluded Umno special general assembly to amend the party's constitution, saying it has made the party more open to the Malays and the country's indigenous people.

He said the party was also making efforts to attract more young people as shown by the proposed formation of Puteri Umno.

"We want to have another door open to enable them to come in early. We also urge the Youth section to make an effort to bring in members at an early age so that they will understand what Umno stands for and its objectives," he told a media conference at the end of the one-day assembly here.

To lure new members, he said Umno branches should not reject registration of those interested in joining the party unless they were found to be unsuitable.

"What we are saying is that everybody is entitled to be registered as Umno members. So we are opening up for more people (to join in)," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he was glad that the amendments were supported by the majority of the delegates with minor changes.

While opinions differed, most importantly the party followed the wishes of the majority, he said.

"There is no split-voting as in the case of the United States presidential elections," he said in reference to the lingering uncertainty over who will become the new American president following a dispute over vote-counting.

He said party members were given ample opportunity from the very beginning to voice out their opinions on the amendments.

"Even until the last minute, we're ready to accept changes but the fact remains that the basis for the amendments is accepted," he said.

The assembly approved 49 of the 50 proposed amendments tabled today including one on streamlining triennial branch, divisional and Supreme Council elections so that they are held in the same year.

An earlier proposal called for the Supreme Council and divisional elections to be held according to the Parliamentary term of about five years.

In endorsing the three-year party election ruling, Dr Mahathir said party members had chosen to take a moderate stance over the matter.

"At the same time, they admit that if party elections are held close to the the general election, it is unhealthy. Therefore, the Council is allowed to withhold party elections if there is a general election in the offing," he said.

On the amendment allowing Category A government officers to hold party posts, Dr Mahathir said this ruling was applicable within Umno.

The government officers concerned would still be required to get the consent from the government in accordance with the General Order (GO).

"If the government gives him a chance to contest, than he can contest...Presently the government can stop its employees from contesting. The party does not," he said.

When asked whether the government had any plan to change the GO, he said: "At the moment, there is no plan for that."

On efforts to combat money politics and corruption within Umno, Dr Mahathir said despite the existence of party laws, some people would still try to abuse their position.

"Even laws which provide for death penalty have not really succeeded in completely stopping the kind of crimes that are punishable by death.

"So here, our punishment is very minimal. At the very most they will be

expelled from the party, they are not going to be hanged," he said.

To another question, Dr Mahathir said Umno was committed to working within the context of the Barisan Nasional and its partners.

"We are not extremist in any way and we think our objectives are consistent with the needs of a multiracial population," he said.

Meanwhile, speaking at the same media conference Deputy Prime Minister and Umno deputy president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said next year's divisional polls would still proceed.

Party elections held after that would abide by the related constitutional amendments approved today, he explained.

Abdullah also said the quota system for nominations for party elections was necessary to determine that only genuinely eligible aspirants and those who enjoy divisional support could contest.

-- BERNAMA

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