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Mahathir-Wanita

WANITA UMNO STILL HAS A ROLE, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 16 (Bernama) -- Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the proposed formation of Puteri Umno does not mean that the party is dissatisfied with the role played by Wanita Umno.

Dr Mahathir, who is the prime minister, said he and the Umno Supreme Council (MT) appreciated the role played by Wanita Umno in the party's struggles and activities from before until now.

"Actually we appreciate very much the role of Wanita Umno. Although a bit senior in age, they (Wanita members) are very active and contribute immensely to Umno's struggles," he told a news conference after chairing an MT meeting here.

He said the meeting agreed with the proposal that Puteri Umno be established to attract more participation of the younger generation in the party's struggles.

However, the method of implementation for Puteri Umno, including the age limit, had yet to be determined, Dr Mahathir said.

Dr Mahathir said: "It does not mean this (Puteri Umno) is a new body to replace it (Wanita movement). There is no such intention. We will ensure that they'll work together."

He said various proposals on Puteri Umno, including the age limit for its members, would be decided at the next MT meeting.

The fixing of the age limit should be done in line with the party's constitutional amendments to ensure the body could play its role well, he said.

Dr Mahathir also said it was inappropriate for certain newspaper reports to label Wanita members as "makcik-makcik" (a form of address for elderly women) because this might give the impression that they were no longer useful.

He said Umno realised the importance of increasing its membership, especially from among quality young people.

"The problem is we could not attract many young people to join Umno, and this is not restricted to Wanita Umno only. It is also hoped that Umno Youth can attract more of the younger generation to join Umno," he said.

Dr Mahathir said there was a suggestion that the Umno constitution be amended to enable youths to join Umno on reaching 16.

"The younger generation should be involved in Umno at an earlier age so that they understand Umno's struggle and can continue with it after the old generation withdraws.

"This does not mean that the old generation has lost its ability to contribute to the Umno struggle. However, we must make preparations for leadership transition and membership in Umno," Dr Mahathir said.

Asked on the possibility that the younger set who joined Umno would only be interested in posts, Dr Mahathir said Umno would know the purpose of someone joining the party.

Dr Mahathir also briefed the MT on his recent visit to Britain and his meeting with Malaysian students in Cambridge and Manchester.

He said Malaysian students still supported the government although there were several questions from opposition party supporters.

"But it could be seen that the response to the visit was very encouraging," he said.

He said there were demonstrations during his visit but they were not staged by Malaysian students.

Dr Mahathir said the demonstration held when he attended a dialogue session with Muslim intellectuals and professionals was staged by Pakistanis, while the one in Cambridge was participated by an Amnesty International human rights group with the support of several Malaysian

students.

"I feel that if clarifications are given, many will change their stand," he said.

-- BERNAMA

RZS MAM AFY YBY