

Wealthy barred

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The rich can't contest top Umno posts, says Dr M

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JITRA: Extremely rich Umno members will be barred from contesting top party posts under a proposal by its president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

He said branch and division chiefs would also not be given government contracts under the proposal aimed at keeping away those who want to join for the sake of getting financial benefits.

Dr Mahathir said the proposals would be discussed by the party supreme council.

He said Umno was confident that such measures would attract people to join the party.

"If they (rich Malays) think money is important to them and they want to become millionaires, billionaires or trillionaires, they have to stop being Umno leaders and concentrate on their business, and the Government will support them to achieve equal

status with other races," he said.

The proposals, Dr Mahathir said, included declaration of assets by those vying for top posts in branches and divisions and seats in the supreme council.

However, the move was not meant to show that Umno should be made up of inferior and poor people, he said.

"We merely want to ensure that Umno is clean and free from unhealthy practices," he said.

Asked for the definition of "rich," Dr Mahathir said: "We will study (this). It is not easy to determine. Maybe there are people who are rich but they do not use money. Maybe there are people who get certain assistance because of the interests of other people who are rich."

Asked how members would react to such measures, he said not all of them would be happy.

"There will be some who will be supportive and some who will not.

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"There will be some who will threaten to join the opposition. This is something we have to face," he said during a break at the Kubang Pasu Umno division delegates' meeting.

Dr Mahathir, who is the division chief, had made the proposals when opening the meeting earlier.

He said the rich liked to use their wealth to influence the decision of delegates, and that such practices had changed the culture of Malays.

"We are afraid that if Malays can easily sell their support, they will sell their race one day," he said.

On the proposal to bar division and branch chiefs from getting government contracts, Dr Mahathir said many members wanted to hold such posts because they thought they would get special treatment from the Government.

He also said he had received allegations of money politics in the Kubang Pasu division but the reports were not very specific.

"I have no evidence. If I get evidence, of course I will take action," he added.

Dr Mahathir said new faces should be given a chance to develop their political career in the party.

"They might ask me as well why I am staying on as the Prime Minister for 20 years and not giving any chance to another person. If this is the party's wish, then I am willing to step down and support whoever for the post," he said.

"I will, however, continue to be an Umno member and serve the party. As Malays, we must remember good deeds because it is our culture."