

Mixed reaction to Dr M's 'bar the wealthy' proposal

KUALA LUMPUR: The proposal by Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to stop "extremely rich" Umno members from grabbing top party posts is seen by political leaders as an attempt to put an end to vote-buying and shady practices in the party.

They welcomed the "cleaning up" in Umno but pointed out not only the rich dealt with money.

The Umno president and Prime Minister had made the proposal on Saturday at the Kubang Pasu Umno divisional delegates meeting in Kedah.

Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said Dr Mahathir's proposal needed to be studied by the party's supreme council in detail, such as the definition of rich and the justification for such a move.

"Money politics will not only destroy the credibility and image of the party but also prevent the rise of second echelon leaders," he told reporters after opening the Subang Umno division delegates meeting yesterday.

Another Umno vice-president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said those who practised money politics in Umno were not necessarily rich.

"They could be funded by other people. Who these people are is not important because we are more concerned with the culture of money politics," he told newsmen after opening the Chenderoh Umno division delegates meeting in Lenggong, Perak.

Umno Youth chief Datuk Hishamuddin Tun Hussein said the proposal reflected the president's seriousness in put-

ting a stop to negative practices.

However, the proposal would have to be seriously looked into as there were rich members who were sincere and good leaders, he told reporters after opening the Tenggara Umno division meeting in Johor.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Rais Yatim said the Umno supreme council should have a mechanism to decide on a person's wealth.

"The problem is how to decide whether a person is considered extremely rich or rich," he said after opening the Segambut Umno division meeting.

Foreign Minister and Kota Tinggi Umno division chief Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said the rich could still be

members of Umno and continue to serve the party, the people and the country.

Malacca Chief Minister and state Umno chief Datuk Wira Mohd Ali Rustam said Dr Mahathir's proposal was a good move to prevent money politics.

He added, however, that there must be a clearer definition of being "rich."

Umno Information chief Datuk Mustapha Mohamad described the proposal as "timely."

It would help to give Umno a cleaner image, he told reporters after opening the Umno Klang division delegates meeting.

Umno supreme council member and Deputy Defence Minister Datuk Shafie Apdal said Dr Mahathir's proposal could be the solution to stop

power abuse and money politics once and for all.

Umno supreme council member Datuk Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor said he feared that those who had used money to join Umno may want something in return for their efforts.

"Umno is not a place for someone to ask for everything," he told reporters at the Seputih Umno delegates meeting.

Supreme council member Datuk Shahrir Abdul Samad said politics of moderation and openness would be more effective for Umno to solve the problem of money politics.

"It is not right to zero-in on those who are rich.

"There are also those who are not rich but make use of money to gain positions," he told reporters after opening

the Johor Baru Umno delegates meeting.

PPP president Datuk M. Kayveas said Dr Mahathir's advice should apply to all Barisan component party members.

Opposition leader Datuk Fadzil Noor said Dr Mahathir's proposal was akin to an open admission that Umno leaders used money in politics.

The PAS president, however, commended Dr Mahathir's bravery in exposing the weakness in Umno.

DAP chairman Lim Kit Siang said Dr Mahathir should pass a legislation to require periodic public declarations of assets for all political office bearers instead of banning the wealthy from contesting party elections.