

# OPEN TO CHINESE

STAR 21 MAY 2001

## Umno to take in Akar members keen to join party

By MUGUNTAN VANAR and RUBEN SARIO

**KOTA KINABALU:** Umno has opened its doors to the Chinese in Sabah although its party constitution will remain the same.

Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the party agreed yesterday to accept the Chinese into Sabah Umno as a special case because of the keen interest shown by Chinese members of the dissolved Parti Akar.

Dr Mahathir said the acceptance of these members was on an ad hoc basis just as the special case of non-Muslim bumiputras, including Christians, who became Umno members when the party spread its wings to Sabah in 1991.

"Since Akar Chinese leaders have shown eagerness to join Umno, we will accept them," he told a packed gathering of Akar members and supporters at Magellan Sutra resort here.

Asked later if the admission of Chinese members into Umno was only confined to Sabah, he replied; "For now it is only confined to Sabah.

"In the beginning we were only willing to accept other bumiputras into Umno. However, we have a precedent in Kedah where we have accepted Thais (non-bumiputras) as Umno members."

Allaying fears that might arise from other Barisan component parties, he said there were not many Sabah Chinese who were going to join Umno.

"There are not many of them. It's just like MCA with Gerakan. It does not affect MCA's position though the Chinese can join either party. It's the same with PPP and MIC," he added.

Asked if the move to open Umno to Sabah Chinese would be expanded to Peninsular Malaysia in the future, Dr Mahathir replied; "Why not. If we come to a stage when people are not too conscious about their race then at that stage, it is possible."

He said Umno itself had gone through many changes, with the party modifying its stand by

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working with the Chinese and Indians during the independence struggle.

"It is through these processes of change that co-operation became closer. Now we have decided that Barisan should function more like a party

than a coalition of parties," he said.

Asked if he would like to see a reduction in the number of Barisan parties in Sabah, he said an eight-member state coalition could still work together.

"If they find that it is better to have a smaller number of

parties, why not?

"MIC, MCA or Gerakan can still function. But if they feel it is better for Sabah to have a lesser number of parties ... yes.

"But if they still want to remain, they should work together as Barisan Nasional," he said.

Chief Minister Datuk Chong Kah Kiat, who is LDP president, said Umno's move to admit Chinese members would not pose a threat to other Barisan parties.

In Klang, MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said yesterday the party had no problems with Umno allow-

ing the Sabah Chinese to join Umno.

Sabah Umno chairman Datuk Osu Sukam said he did not know if Umno's constitution would allow Chinese to join the party.

"We will leave this to party higher-ups in Kuala Lumpur to decide," he said.