

Sabah Chinese can join Umno

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Party may admit other races in future, says Mahathir

By Roy Goh

KOTA KINABALU, Sun: Umno today opened its doors to the Chinese in Sabah and party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said it is possible that other races will be allowed to join the party in future.

"If we come to a stage when people are not too conscious about their race ... at that stage it is possible," he told a press conference after presiding over the dissolution of Angkatan Keadilan Rakyat (Akar), a Sabah Barisan Nasional component, here.

"Umno is for the Malays but because it is important that we expand in Sabah, we have accepted non-Muslim bumiputras as party members and now we will also accept Chinese into Umno.

"Though the majority of Umno members are Malays and Muslims, we are giving a place to non-bumiputras."

Mahathir, who is BN chairman, said this is not something unusual as in the peninsula, Umno had also accepted Thais as members.

Leaders of BN component parties welcomed the decision as one that will bring Umno one step closer towards becoming a multi-racial party, as envisaged by Mahathir in a remark he once made.

Mahathir did not see the move affecting other parties in the coalition. "There are not many (non-bumiputras joining Umno). Just like between Gerakan and MCA, Gerakan's existence does not necessarily mean it affects MCA's position," he said.

On whether Umno members in the peninsular will accept the move, he said they have accepted members who are non-Muslims from Sabah thus far.

He added: "I don't see any problems. We must

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look into the history of Umno. When it was founded, it was entirely Malay. They could not even work with the Chinese and Indians. But for the purpose of struggling for Independence, they were prepared to modify their stand.

"This process goes on. The cooperation over time became very much closer. Now, we have decided that the BN should function more like a party rather than a coalition of parties."

Mahathir said all these things take time, referring to the time when Umno founder, the late Datuk Onn Jaafar opened the party to non-Malays only to be rejected, but when Tunku Abdul Rahman took over, he found a new way for Umno to work with non-Malays by forming the Alliance.

"So you see, in Malaysia if we progress gently, taking into consideration all the factors, we will be saved. But when people try to change overnight, we always meet a lot of problems even if the change is for the better," he said.

Earlier, after Mahathir declared Akar dissolved, the majority of its members led by party president Datuk Pandikar Amin Mulia joined Umno.