

Umno weak because commitment is lacking, say leaders

PETALING JAYA, Thurs: Umno leaders said today they agree with the view of Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad that the party is weak now because there is a lack of commitment among members.

The Umno president had said in an interview with *Asiaweek* that over the years the people have become materialistic and it was a tough battle to fight.

In the Jan 26 report titled *When you grow old, you face reality*, Mahathir was asked to comment on various issues, including Umno, in which he expressed his frustration with the party, particularly over money politics and power struggle.

Commenting on the interview, supreme council member Datuk Shahrir Samad said he agrees with Mahathir, but added that what happened in Umno started when "Mahathir handed over his duties as party president to his deputy president, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim".

The damage was done during this period, Shahrir said,

when Mahathir neglected the party and Anwar used Umno for his own political purposes.

"There were several groups involved in money politics and this culture was allowed to develop during that time where Umno members at grassroots level were on the permanent payroll of certain leaders and were used as a political strategy.

"This happened because Anwar was given a free-hand to handle Umno, to the exclusion of everyone else ... I admit the Anwar factor has affected Umno," he added.

However, Shahrir said, in order for Umno to become relevant to the Malays, there is a need for party leaders to hear views from all members.

"It should not be the case where the perception is that only Umno leaders or cabinet members know best. If so, how can the village people voice their views, for Umno used to be a community-based political party," he said.

Vice-president Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad

Taib said many party members are still committed, despite many changes over the years in the party.

He said if there was no dedication on their part, Umno would not have continued to win the general election with a two-third majority, together with the other Barisan Nasional component parties.

"Umno is still there, its just that the scenario and circumstances have changed," he said.

On the Anwar factor, Muhammad said since he was the deputy prime minister, many people were close to him and when he went down, a lot of them were disappointed. "They too lost their opportunity to come up," he added.

Muhammad also said that there is nothing wrong in being materialistic as long as a person stands by his principles and has proper discipline, like the Japanese who are very successful because they have these values.

Former Umno Youth chief and presently supreme coun-

cil member Datuk Zahid Hamidi said there is no longer fighting spirit in the party.

He said Umno should not be too complacent in order for the party to survive, and that "the party leaders must be hyper-sensitive to grassroots grouses".

"At one time people use to come to Umno, now they want Umno to come to them," said Zahid expressing support on Mahathir's comment.

On party members and leaders whose main intention is to gain position or become ministers, Beranang assemblyman Ahmad Kuris Mohd Nor agreed with the prime minister's concern.

"Umno members, right from leaders to grassroots, must always be aware of the reasons why the party was set up, and certainly not for an individual's political mileage to gain wealth or power," he said.

Ahmad Kuris said an approach must be sought where Umno members, regardless of their level, can be self-conscious of their purpose of being with the party.