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Dr M meets grassroots leaders

KUALA NERANG, Thurs. - Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today met grassroots leaders in the Padang Terap and Pokok Sena divisions, but a scheduled dialogue at the same function was called off.

The Prime Minister met some 2,000 divisional and branch leaders at a gathering themed "Majlis Perjumpaan Mesra Bersama Perdana Menteri", where a dialogue was also part of the programme.

The dialogue was to enable the party president and leaders in the two divisions to chart the next course of action and find ways to strengthen the party in the State.

(Padang Terap and Pokok Sena are Pas-held constituencies following their victories in the 1999 general election).

It is learnt that the dialogue was called off after Dr Mahathir found out that only selected speakers were allowed to raise issues and ask questions. Dr Mahathir, it is understood, had wanted the dialogue to be open and not a controlled and orchestrated one.

Another meeting with Sik and Baling leaders has been planned for tomorrow in Sik.

The meeting is the first of its kind after the general election and is part of a series of similar gatherings planned between Dr Mahathir and Umno divisions nationwide.

Among those present were Padang Terap Umno chief Datuk Dr Afiffudin Omar and Pokok Sena Umno chief Ahmad Lebai Sudin and the divisions' Youth and Wanita chiefs.

Dr Mahathir spoke for about 90 minutes and covered a wide range of current issues.

He also outlined the role to be played by Umno leaders in rural development.

He re-emphasised the need for Malays to be united and reminded them of the hardship faced when the country was colonised.

On certain quarters' perception that Umno leaders with governmental posts had forgotten people in the villages, Dr Mahathir said it was not true.

Umno leaders, he said, had worked hard to provide various facilities and they would continue to serve the people as long as they enjoyed the support of party members.

Dr Mahathir said Umno leaders had contributed a lot to the rural people, including opening up of land schemes, building roads and other amenities.

He called on the people to ensure Umno remained a strong party and said, therefore, its leaders must continue to contribute to the people.

"When we are united, we become strong. Umno can do so many things when it is strong," the Prime Minister said.

Dr Mahathir also reminded party members they could no longer be complacent and dependent on others to carry out their duties to the party.

He said over the years, members had become lazy and inactive in carrying out activities which could strengthen the party.

"Those days, when there was an election, members would spring into action and open operation centres.

"Nowadays, operation centres will not be opened unless an allocation is given... of course money is also needed but the more important thing is the spirit and willingness to work hard for the party."

Later in Alor Star, Dr Mahathir attended a dinner with Barisan Nasional

leaders and members at Kota Star Municipal Council hall.

In his speech, he repeated his call for Umno members to remain united.

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