

23/06/2001

Suggestions, clarifications and debate the order of second day

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Delegates had a field day debating issues ranging from the economy, education to religion, as the Umno general assembly moved into its second day today.

Some were blunt while others tried their best to be diplomatic, but the bottom line was that the delegates managed to convey messages from the grassroots to the party leadership.

Some of the messages were not music to the ears but there seemed to be an upbeat mood and confidence, a bit muted compared to last year's general assembly.

A few took the opportunity to clarify previous "controversies" including Malaysia Action Front committee member Datuk Ibrahim Ali, who is Pasir Mas division chief.

He cleared the air about the controversial gathering organised by the Front this year.

However, Ibrahim's criticism of Umno Youth sparked a "row" between him and Youth chief Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein, with the latter challenging him to ensure victory in Kelantan first before talking about Umno youth.

Hishammuddin said Ibrahim should rectify his own weaknesses before pointing fingers at others.

Ibrahim, debating the president's address, had bluntly criticised Umno Youth. He said they had failed to carry out their duties aggressively and efficiently.

His remarks appeared to irritate Hishammuddin, especially when he said: "If you are not capable of doing it... then pass the job as Umno youth head to me in 2004. We need not contest. If he is really sincere to the race, religion and country, then this is the best solution."

Today's proceedings also provided the first opportunity for Puteri Umno pro-tem chief Azalina Othman Said's appearance at the general assembly.

Azalina grabbed the opportunity to voice Puteri Umno's views to the 2,027 delegates.

"Give us a chance to prove our abilities our way," said Azalina.

"This generation is a generation who can think for themselves. With the right guidance, they could face any upcoming issues.

"As much as we appreciate criticism, we should not be lambasted with baseless criticism. Give us the opportunities to move and develop in our own mould."

The debate also centred on other issues, including a request from a delegate that the party consider special allocations for divisions to carry out their activities.

In a Press conference at the end of the proceedings, party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad indicated that their request might be considered.

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