

Leaders support PM's stand on government contracts

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. — Most Umno leaders supported the party's stand that division leaders should not expect government contracts, but some pointed out the contracts were their source to fund activities in their divisions.

Marang Umno deputy head Datuk Dr Abdul Latiff Awang said some divisional leaders were interested in government contracts as they claimed they need the money for divisional activities.

"If Umno does not want division heads to expect government awards, then the party should perhaps increase the allocation given to each division to carry out activities.

"By doing so, divisional heads can no longer use that excuse."

He was responding to reports in which party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad made a statement to the effect, after chairing the Umno supreme council meeting Monday.

Abdul Latiff, who is a former State executive council member, said those awarded Government contracts at present only used a small portion of the money for activities in their division.

Kuala Nerus division head Datuk Abdul Rashid Ngah said Dr Mahathir's statement did not mean Umno division heads should not be involved in business at all.

"They must ensure that there is no conflict of interest. Umno division heads should not be expecting the contracts alone. They should look for other methods and not contest for party posts with the hope to be awarded contracts."

Kuala Krai Umno division head Datuk Wan Zaid Wan Abdullah echoed similar sentiment saying division leaders should not use their positions to secure contracts from the government.

However, Wan Zaid said it was unfair to ask them to resign as some had become contractors much earlier.

"Only one division head in Kelantan is a contractor and he has been in the business long before taking over the post," he said.

Meanwhile, Kedah Umno chairman Datuk Seri Syed Razak Syed Zain said division chiefs who used their positions to win Government contracts were giving the party a bad name.

He said such leaders were jeo-

pardising Umno's efforts to win greater support from Malay voters in the next general election.

"Umno is going all-out to woo the support of target groups which we have identified, such as civil servants and 'fence-sitters' in the Malay community.

"These people are very aware of the actions of Umno leaders, so unless we can assure them that Umno is a transparent party with no tolerance for corrupt leaders, we will not be able to win their support," he said when contacted today in Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei, where he is currently on a private visit.

Syed Razak, who is also Menteri Besar and Kuala Kedah Umno division chief, said although division heads were allowed to engage in businesses, awarding Government contracts to them raised questions over conflicts of interests.

"The guiding principle here is that division chiefs in Kedah cannot be awarded with Government contracts."

"In addition, whatever business activities in which the State Government is involved in must be conducted in the most transparent

manner possible."

Johor Baru Umno division chief Datuk Shahrir Abdul Samad said Umno leaders should not use the need for fund for party activities as an excuse for them to use their position to amass personal wealth.

Supporting Dr Mahathir's assertion that Umno 'division chiefs should not be involved in business, especially if they only hoped to win Government contracts, Shahrir said a real leader should not have problems in raising funds for party activities if they could come up with good programmes.

"I am quite confident there will be contributions for party activities if we can come up with proper programmes, which could truly be benefitted by the public.

"Such contributions may come from a lot of sources such as the Malay business fraternity and others in the private sector."

Malacca Chief Minister and Umno Supreme Council member Datuk Seri Mohd Ali Rustam who supported Dr Mahathir on the issue said:

"Malacca has five divisions. We do not have any division heads seeking Government contracts."