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`Run without crutches' (HL)

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Continuing to exist in a controlled, artificial environment will render the Malays and Bumiputeras unfit for the challenges of the real world, Umno deputy president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today.

In order to enhance their competitiveness, the Deputy Prime Minister said, the Malays and Bumiputeras must be exposed to the real meaning of competition from an early stage.

"Competition in a controlled environment may give them confidence. But this confidence is untested and will last only until they enter the real world."

He said the Maktab Rendah Sains Mara and matriculation centres that had exclusively recruited Malay and Bumiputera students were examples of this artificial environment that did not reflect the reality of the world.

"These educational facilities have produced many Malay and Bumiputera alumni; now it is time competition was enhanced in these institutions."

He said that was why non-Bumiputera students would be accepted at MRSM and matriculation centres and the intake increased by 10 per cent. It was also a step in achieving national integration.

He said Malay students should view this as an opportunity to succeed in competition among all races, not just their own.

Speaking at the joint opening of the Umno Youth and Wanita assemblies and the Puteri Umno convention at the Putra World Trade Centre, Abdullah also said meritocracy should never be interpreted as a sacrifice of the rights and privileges of the Malays and Bumiputeras.

"Meritocracy must be viewed as an effort to strengthen the Malays and Bumiputeras in the face of global challenges. In the final analysis, Malays and Bumiputeras must stand on their own and run the race without crutches."

He said meritocracy was an attempt to build courage among the Malays in the face of competition and inspire the desire to scale great heights.

"I appeal to the Malays and Bumiputeras to give greater priority to education.

"Malay and Bumiputera families must be more diligent and wiser in mapping out educational programmes for their children by planning their finances, identifying strategic courses and giving constant encouragement to their children."

On the strengthening of Umno, Abdullah said members must try to avoid conflicts among themselves.

If not, he said, such conflicts would waste a lot of time and effort in the search for amicable solutions.

"In our efforts to unite the party, its leaders must first be united.

"Party members will be more united if there is leadership by example."

Abdullah said internal conflicts were the result of those who sought power above all else, and in the process enhance the influence of kingmakers and powerbrokers.

"The quest for political power suddenly becomes personally profitable for these people. Leaders are treated like commodities, priced commercially to bargain with and to sell.

"With this, political corruption rears its ugly head and with it the loss of reason, the marginalisation of the party's interest and the destruction of our community's struggle."

He said the party's constitution allowed for the democratic selection of leaders and that such contests, if conducted cleanly and fairly without recourse to bribery, slander and threats would strengthen, not weaken it.

He said all members must resolve to remove animosity within them and commit to building a common platform for all.

"Among the Youth, there should not be a Hishammuddin and non-Hishammuddin camp.

"In Wanita, there should not be a Rafidah and non-Rafidah camp.

"And in Puteri, there should not be a Azalina and non-Azalina camp.

"We are all under the leadership of one leader, one president.

"Our loyalty and services are only for Umno under the august leadership of Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad."

He said Malays should be more concerned with substance and not form.

"Do not mistake flowing robes for religious knowledge nor domes for mosques.

"Genuine Malays should hold to the truth and support what is true and abandon what is false, preserve what is good and purify what is bad."

(END)