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Don't do anything to sideline other communities, Umno members told

JITRA, Fri. - Umno members must not be arrogant and abuse their positions in ensuring that civil servants meet their every demand, because this could cause the party to lose the support of up to three million voters.

Party president and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that members must also not do anything to sideline other groups such as the Chinese and Indian communities.

"Don't say `so-and-so government officers are useless because they won't do this and that which we, Umno members, have ordered them to do, so can the Government please sack these people?'

"If we hold this attitude, we will lose one million votes because that is the total number of civil servants in the country."

Dr Mahathir, accompanied by Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, said this when launching Puteri Umno's Special Election Unit at Dewan Wawasan here.

Dr Mahathir added that if spouses and children of civil servants were taken into account, an alienation of the civil service could ultimately cause Umno to lose as many as three million votes.

"It is not the individual or the party alone that can bring victory to Umno, but the non-members who support the party, like the Chinese and Indians.

"Therefore, we must maintain good relations with people who can assure Umno of victory," he said.

Dr Mahathir said even though such groups by themselves were not the determining factor for an Umno victory, they could cause a defeat for the party and a win for the Opposition.

"Therefore, unless a clear offence has been committed, we must not act in an arrogant manner just because we are from a government party," he said.

Dr Mahathir also reminded party members that Umno would suffer the same fate as political parties in other countries, which fought for independence but had now lost support, if members placed self-interests above that of the party's.

He noted how the trend of members who jostled for positions to serve their own self-interests was already present in Umno.

Dr Mahathir said he hoped that Puteri Umno would create a "new and different culture" to ensure that it was not affected by the "culture of self-interests" that was becoming apparent among some members in the main body of Umno.

"With this new culture, defined by noble values and a realisation that what is important is Umno and not personal interests, the contribution of Puteri Umno will bring success to the party in the next general election."

Among those present today were Umno vice-president Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib, secretary-general Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob, information chief Tan Sri Megat Junid Megat Ayob, Kedah Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Syed Razak Syed Zain, Perlis Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim, Puteri Umno chief Azalina Othman Said and the movement's Kedah chief Suraya Yaacob.

The Puteri Umno Special Election Unit is made up of members tasked with heading campaigning in each voting area.

Unit members would be trained in managing members who will be on duty during the upcoming general election.

The first team in the unit will consist of 230 members representing

every state constituency in northern Perak, Penang, Perlis and Kedah.

Azalina in her speech said the Special Election Unit members had much to learn despite gaining valuable experience over the years in helping the BN and Umno during by-elections.

"We want to help the BN and Umno win back the seats which were lost to the Opposition during the last general election in 1999," she said.

She said the members would be exposed to various issues pertaining to managing and running election operations centres.

The Prime Minister and Dr Siti Hasmah later attended a Chinese New Year open house gathering hosted by Kubang Pasu Barisan Nasional at Sekolah Kebangsaan Cina Yit Min in Changlun.

Meanwhile, Kedah Umno has not ruled out the possibility of fielding a State Puteri Umno candidate to contest in the next general election.

Menteri Besar and State Umno liaison committee chairman Datuk Seri Syed Razak Syed Zain said any party member, regardless of age and gender, stood a chance of serving the rakyat as the people's representative (wakil rakyat).

He said the main criterion was the candidate's ability to win the hearts and minds of voters.

However, Syed Razak, who is also State Barisan Nasional chairman, said it was still too early for him to start selecting potential candidates for the elections.

He instead urged all members to concentrate on preparing the election machinery first.