

**Umno Elections Blaze Trail For Change, Greater Democracy - Muhyiddin
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MUAR, Oct 12 (Bernama) -- Umno deputy president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin on Saturday spoke highly of this year's Umno elections for what he described as greater democracy in the party and took a dig at the opposition DAP which had to hold elections again over irregularities.

The deputy prime minister said Umno was bold enough to hand over to hundreds of thousands of its members at the divisional level the mandate to elect the party's top leadership.

The Umno elections blazed the trail for renewal in appreciation of the need to embrace change and greater democracy in the party's own mould, he said in his speech opening the delegates' meetings of the Pagoh Wanita Umno, Umno Youth and Puteri Umno.

The text of his speech was read out at the three meetings by the respective divisional heads of the three wings.

In this year's elections, Umno adopted the electoral college system whereby close to 150,000 members are given the opportunity to elect the party's top leaders instead of confining that privilege to a few thousand as in the past.

Muhyiddin said only a small number of members elected the DAP leadership, but the election process drew protests from members and the elections had to be held again.

"This is not exemplary of a party upholding democracy," he said in reference to the DAP.

The opposition party had to hold the elections again after the Registrar of Societies nullified the elections following allegations of irregularities.

Muhyiddin said that with 33,273 candidates vying for various positions in the party and to be elected by about 146,000 delegates around the country, Umno was seen as a more transparent, open and democratic party.

He also said that the electoral college system adopted by the party reflected its maturity as there were also no tight rules governing the eligibility of members to contest the elections at any level.

Muhyiddin also said that though Umno encouraged an open election system, it did not mean that the party could not practise the principle of consultation to strengthen the party.

He said that if there was consensus among party members, it was needless for a contest for positions such as party president and deputy president. Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak and Muhyiddin were returned unopposed as party president and deputy president in the current elections.

"With the spirit of consultation and unity in the party, the leadership transition occurs in an orderly and organised manner. The important thing is for us to have consensus. Maintain party unity and, God willing, Umno will grow stronger and more united," he said.

Muhyiddin said the party might have come through the 13th General Election unscathed, but the greater challenge remained of retaining the support of the people, particularly the Malays, in the next general election.

The huge challenge was to determine how to maintain Umno as the party of first choice of the Malays because the party would only be strong if the Malays from one generation and the next continued to uphold the party's struggle, he said.

"Realising this, we have to focus on drawing the support of the young people for our struggle. We have to convince them that Umno's struggle is for their benefit.

"I am convinced that with such support, Umno will become stronger in the future," he said.

Muhyiddin said efforts to strengthen Umno were a major challenge for the party because disunity would result in the party losing the trust and support of the Malays.

He said Umno had to be strong as it was the only party of the Malays which championed Islam, empowered Bahasa Melayu, defended the institution of the royalty and upheld the dignity of the community.

Most importantly, he said, Umno never felt apologetic about championing the Malays and bumiputeras because that was the platform that the party believed in according to the principles of justice and equality.

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