

DR M: I'M WILLING TO LISTEN

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MASJID TANAH, Sun. — **Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad** said today that he was prepared to listen to any offers of a compromise to avoid a contest among the "Big Four" in the Umno elections but he must first know the terms involved.

The Prime Minister and Umno president said that up to now, however, he did not have details of any compromise move.

He was replying to questions from reporters after opening the Alor Gajah Umno division's delegates meeting here.

The "Big Four" are Dr Mahathir, Trade and Industry Minister Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, Deputy Prime Minister Abdul

Ghfar Baba and Umno deputy president Datuk Musa Hitam.

Tengku Razaleigh is expected to challenge Dr Mahathir for the presidency while Encik Ghfar is expected to try and oust Datuk Musa from the deputy presidency.

Dr Mahathir said that he could not comment any further on a possible compromise as "I must first know the terms involved."

"Is it that I serve as president for one year, and then there is another president, and another at the back of this president?"

"Or do we have president number one and president number two? All kinds of things can happen," he said.

Asked if he was willing to listen to any terms that are offered, he replied: "I will listen. I always listen."

To another question, he replied that he was not aware of any compromise before. "I have never studied the question of compromise (before)," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said he was not aware if Umno Youth chief Anwar Ibrahim would be willing to pull out from the race for a vice-presidency to ensure a compromise among the "Big Four."

"How can I know? I don't look after him," he replied.

On Tengku Razaleigh's statement yesterday that he was working with Datuk Musa Hitam "to help solve problems facing the nation," Dr Mahathir said: "He has every right. He is in the Government."

"Tengku Razaleigh is solving the problems in the Government

now. He is a member of the Cabinet."

Earlier, Dr Mahathir told delegates that it was Umno's tradition to give full support to its leader, irrespective of who he was.

He said that when Tun Abdul Razak was Deputy Prime Minister he (Tun Razak) did not agree 100 per cent with what Tunku Abdul Rahman did.

Dr Mahathir, who said he was close to the late Tun Razak, added that Tun Razak was disappointed with many things.

"But he did not expose this openly because it was against Umno's tradition (to do so). He did not oppose the Tunku because no one would have respected Umno if he had done so," he added.

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Dr Mahathir said he did not know the situation when Tun Razak took over and Tun Hussein Onn was his deputy, but said the same thing could have happened.

"When I was appointed as Deputy Prime Minister under Tun Hussein, I did not agree with many things he did.

"But I worked to ensure that he got full support as Prime Minister and party leader," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he gave his full support to Tun Hussein because he wanted Umno to be an effective party.

"I am not saying that this must be done for me but this is my philosophy — if there is no Umno, there can be no leader, no effective government," he added.

Dr Mahathir said Umno must learn from the state of affairs in a Barisan Nasional component party which was embroiled in a bitter power struggle and later held an election to pick a president.

"The result was a split and divided party which could not win enough seats in last year's general election," he said.

Similarly, he said, Umno should not have "unnecessary contests" which could affect its credibility.

"Where would be our credibility if in our contest for party posts, we accuse a person of being bad or corrupt and then in the general election say that he is not?" he asked.

He said he was not campaigning to become party president but campaigning to ensure that Umno remained strong for the sake of the Malays, Islam, the nation and the fate of the other races in the country.

"No individual owns Umno, it is owned by the members — the Malays," he added.

He said every time there was a contest, it must be ensured that Umno would not be split because it was the backbone of the Barisan Nasional.

"This responsibility is bigger than the ambitions of some people. Their ambitions can be set aside," he said.

He added that although contests were part of Umno's democratic system, they were not compulsory.

As such, he said, those ambitious for power should not use democracy as an excuse to contest for top posts.

"Under democracy, everybody is eligible to contest but if there is no contest, it is also democracy," he said.

He said democracy, which Umno had abided by for over 30 years, could bring about happiness only when it was used properly.

"Democracy is like a sharp knife, it can be used for many useful purposes but if it is used to stab someone, it would lead to death.

"There is nothing wrong with the knife, only with the hand which misuses it," he added.

Dr Mahathir also said if there must be contests, they should be conducted as "friendly matches."