

Strength of Umno lies in its unity: Mahathir

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BUTTERWORTH, Fri. — The strength of Umno lies not in its huge membership but in its unity and discipline, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said it would be of no use for the party to have 1.4 million members if the members were divided or if there was constant bickering in its ranks.

"A party with 10,000 members who are united is definitely stronger than one with 1.4 million members who are divided."

The Prime Minister was speaking at the opening of the Bagan Umno divisional delegates conference.

He reminded discontented members to "open their hearts" and learn from history.

History, he said, has proven how effective unity was for the Malays who had previously been known to be a divided lot.

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The party's set-up is like a pyramid, he said. There can only be one at the apex because there is place for only one there.

"This we must accept and if there are others wanting to be at the apex, there is a proper way and time be-

"Umno was formed out of desperation during the Emergency as a result of the British rule, which neglected Malay interests.

"The Malays were weak at the time. There were no professionals and millionaires from among them and they had no good weapons to show that they were strong," he said.

The best way for them to overcome these weaknesses was to put aside their differences — caused partly by their loyalty to their States — and to unite.

The party's membership, the Prime Minister said, was much less than 1.4 million then.

"But because of our unity and solidarity even a world power like the British had to bow out in the end," he said.

The general election last year in which Umno swept all the parliamentary seats allocated to it was another indication of its strength through unity.

Dr Mahathir said Umno has stood tall because its leader does not stand alone but does so with the strength of the whole party behind him. That is why, he said, an Umno president is always respected by all in the country.

This institution must be maintained. Umno members must support the president in order for the party to be united and strong.

If Umno is divided, the respect that people in the country have for the party will no longer be there, he said.

cause nobody can be at the summit forever," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he regretted the actions of certain Umno members who, in order to serve their personal interests, changed their tune about the situation in the country.

Prior to last year's general election, these people were defending the Government and emphasising that all was well in the country. Yet the same people were now blaming the Umno leadership for "problems".

"If we are to have another general election now, the opposition parties would not hesitate to point out that there are those in the party who have lost their credibility," he said.

The Prime Minister also hit out at those who claimed that they were prevented from speaking or were subjected to too much pressure at Umno supreme council meetings.

"This is impossible. Some of the meetings last for five or six hours. Does it mean that only one person was speaking for five or six hours?"

Dr Mahathir said while democracy had given everyone rights it did not mean that there should be no limit to these rights.

"Although we practise democracy, we should not lose our Malay characteristics and these call for orderliness and discipline. There is a proper way to do things," he said.

Dr Mahathir reminded members not to forego tradition because "if we do that, we will be up against a big problem".