

Mahathir: It is just a technical matter

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad accepts that "Umno no longer exists" but is confident that the spirit of the struggle remains strong among the Malays.

"It is especially so among those who possess the spirit which made the party what it used to be. Its image is untarnished even if you rub out the name or call it by any other," he said.

Dr Mahathir said, difficult as it was, he had to accept that Umno was an unlawful society. "If the law says so and the court interprets so, what is there for me to say."

But "we" are not appealing against the court decision.

Though the Registrar of Societies has yet to act to deregister Umno, he said: "I understand that the registrar will have to take cognizance of the court decision."

Speaking at a Press conference at the Prime Minister's Department, he said he was no longer Umno president and Datuk Seri Sanusi Junid, who was seated on his left, was no longer the secretary-general.

Also present was Deputy Prime Minister Ghafar Baba, Trade and Industry Minister Datin Paduka Rafidah Aziz, Culture and Tourism Minister Datuk Sabbaruddin Chik and Youth and Sports Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

Asked for plans of action to reinstate the party, he said: "We have many options, but we will make known our decision in due course."

Asked about the future, Dr Mahathir said it was as "as bright as those lamps", pointing to the bright television lights in the room. "The problem is not so difficult it cannot be solved".

But it was not as simple as writing to the Registrar of Societies to set the process of re-registration of the party going, he said.

Earlier, when asked the same question, he said as he was no longer president. Anyone could initiate his own moves, he added. "It does not depend on me alone."

During the Press conference, the Prime Minister reiterated that what was happening was not a crisis. Among the related questions asked was whether what was happening was the "most serious crisis" in his Prime Ministership.

"It is not a crisis. It is just a technical matter," he said.

Dr Mahathir said it was obvious that there existed people who wished to destroy the party and "perhaps they take pleasure in seeing Umno in this predicament".

He said the action of the 11 people "has destroyed Umno completely".

On the image of Umno, a question also alluded to the Malay

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proverb of *sebab nila setitik rosak susu sebelanga* (a drop of indigo spoils a whole potful of milk).

To this Dr Mahathir said the party image did not suffer. As Umno had a membership of about 1.4 million people "there is bound to be a few *titik* (drops) here and there — people who are frustrated and who want positions but could not get them.

"Because they could not get them, they want to destroy what they could not get. What we are seeing today is the result of the ambitions of some people."

He said the problems within the party would be settled if members loved the party but if they had selfish personal interests things would be difficult.

Dissatisfaction such as those which led the 11 to court had been felt by members in the past, but their love for the party had restrained them

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from taking actions that would destroy the party.

To a question as to whose ambitions the 11 members represented since they were ordinary members of the party, he said: "You are entitled to make your own judgment."

He said what had happened to Umno was a lesson for all. In future, parties should exercise care when choosing people as members who in turn should be careful as to whom they choose to represent them in their respective parties.

Asked for his message to the people to avoid confusion, he said: "We will explain to the people in our own way and I think they will not be unduly disturbed by it."