

# Internal bickering will ruin party, says Dr M

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**KUALA LUMPUR:** Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has warned against internal bickering and suspicions which can lead to the party's downfall.

"He said Umno had grown over the past years to become strong enough to withstand threats from outside but needed to be wary against internal problems, which certain quarters were trying to arouse.

Touching on the circulation of poison-pen letters criticising certain leaders, the Prime Minister said those behind it were Umno's enemies out to weaken the party.

"They have ill-intentions and are out to weaken our spirit. They know that they cannot shake Umno from outside and have resorted to trying to get under our skin through such letters.

"They know that Umno will only fall if the members inside become suspicious of one another and there is mistrust and friction among leaders," he said when winding up the debate at the end of the three-day party general assembly.

Dr Mahathir said only cowards would resort to distributing poison-pen letters and regretted that certain delegates had described the letters as being good to some extent in advising leaders.

These letters, he said, were based on half-truths, where an issue was addressed with a mixture of facts and lies to present a picture to convince readers it could well be true.

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# Leaders advised not to break tradition

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He said in Umno, supreme council leaders consulted members for advice and vice-versa and leaders were prepared to face positive criticism, so long as it was beneficial.

"We do not want any leader to forget this tradition and to feel six inches above others," he added.

On the party's elections next year, Dr Mahathir said Umno practised democracy in allowing members to determine their leaders but cautioned that the system would only be good and effective if it was used wisely.

"We pick a leader not to give him a status but so that he can do something positive for the struggle. We do not elect a president, deputy president and vice-presidents to make them leaders in name only.

"For the leader to be able to perform his responsibilities effectively, he must have the support of the members.

"But there are times when leaders fall in love with their seats and entertain any requests from their supporters just to be re-elected even if it is detrimental to the party."

Dr Mahathir also expressed concern over political corruption in the party which he said could obstruct the struggle.

He brushed aside suggestions from one delegate that the party resort to fighting corruption with corruption, saying that this would create a negative tradition that would bring adverse effects.

"When I touched on political corruption in the presidential address, I was not making references at the top level alone but also at the lower ranks. Now, tours are even offered in branch level contests."

"In the past, it was difficult in Umno to pick a leader as every member who was approached declined calls to stand for election.

"Today, people offer themselves saying they can be the candidate and look at various means to be elected even before we can open our mouth. I am afraid of what will happen next year," he added.

Dr Mahathir hoped that members would not make keen contests a practice in the party although everyone was free to contest any post.