

Dr M advises members not to be parochial

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KUALA TERENGGANU, Fri. — Grassroots Umno members have been told to accept whoever is chosen to lead them at the branch or divisional levels to help ensure unity, party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said unity at the grassroots level was important and should not be allowed to be adversely affected.

He added that the party would not want to see some members whose candidates failed in the contests to support the opposition party in the general election instead.

"Should this happen, it shows that they are not supporting the party's struggle but fighting for the interest of certain individuals. This is not appropriate," Dr Mahathir told reporters after addressing a gathering of Umno members and community leaders at Menteri Besar Tan Sri Wan Mokhtar Ahmad's residence here.

Dr Mahathir was elaborating on his speech in which he pointed out that the unity in Umno at the national level was strong but feared the same could not be said at the lower level due to parochialism.

He said parochialism would weaken the party as had been proven in Kelantan where Umno lost in the last general election. Similarly, this was also the reason why Terengganu fell to

the opposition in one of the previous general elections.

He added that since Umno was established, the party did not classify its members based on the States or areas where they were registered. This has been a major success in Umno's struggle to unite the members.

He said: "The funny thing is that while members can accept leaders from other States, they cannot accept those elected in their own areas or villages. This is our weakness."

Dr Mahathir said when the party lost (in general election), it was not because of the strength of the opposition but because Umno members "deliberately weaken the party."

He said: "When we choose a candidate, there is always resentment. If members give priority to the party's struggle, then they should accept whoever are chosen and support them to ensure that they win."

He reminded members that it was the party that would bring benefits to them.

He also said that in a democratic process, the people could elect and change the leaders every five years.

"If leaders are not suitable, the people have the right to change them," he said, adding that they could not do so if the country was run under the feudal system.