

Choose leaders carefully: Dr M

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By JAHABAR SADIQ

UMNO president and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said party members must reject money politics and choose their leaders carefully in the party polls today and tomorrow to ensure Umno remains strong.

There have been reports, he said, of vast amounts of money being used in the campaign for posts in the party elections this year.

"There is also news of people being kidnapped but I have yet to verify such reports," Dr Mahathir told newsmen after meeting Umno divisional leaders at the Putra World Trade Centre in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Umno, the dominant party in the ruling Barisan Nasional, is holding its annual general assembly, starting today with the Youth and Wanita general assemblies. The main assembly starts tomorrow.

On his meeting with the divisional leaders, Dr Mahathir said he spoke on the new voting system, methods of determining the next crop of leaders and ways to make the party strong and enduring.

The party president, who set the tradition of meeting divisional leaders before each general assembly when he took up the post in 1981, said he repeated the message several times in his 45-minute meeting.

He disclosed that he also advised the losers in the elections to continue being active in the party while the winners must not become proud because of their success.

"Everyone has a role to play in this party," he added.

Dr Mahathir also said that this year's election campaign for party posts has been fierce, and there have been reports of undesirable activities, but he quickly added that it has generally been smooth.

Pointing out that this year's campaign is not as damaging as the 1987 election campaign which split the party, the party president said his advice to the divisional leaders is one from "an old man".

He admitted that his advice and views can be misinterpreted but stressed: "I am neutral. I can work with anyone as I have no teams. Everyone is in my team."

Asked if this year's elections will lead to a generational transition in the party,



Dr Mahathir said such events are normal as he himself was said to have been involved in a generational transition when he was elected to the party Supreme Council in the 1970s.

"As time goes by, the younger people take over. Old people cannot last forever," Dr Mahathir remarked, adding that he will serve as long as he is required by Umno.

On the position of former deputy president Ghafar Baba, who quit the post last Monday, Dr Mahathir said he remains an ordinary Umno member and also Federal Territory Umno liaison chief.

He said he has yet to meet Ghafar since he returned last week from the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Cyprus and the Government has not decided on how best to honour Ghafar for his contributions to the nation.

On the appointment of a new deputy prime minister, Dr Mahathir said he will take his time to announce it, adding that this can be any time in the next two years.

Asked if the new Umno

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is also Home Minister, has rejected Australia's request to extradite Raja Kamarul Bahrin Shah Raja Ahmad to face charges of illegally bringing his children back here. "After advice from the Attorney-General, I find there is no ground for us to accede to Australia's request," he said.

He also said the new Attorney-General, who he said will be from the civil service, will be appointed once the Yang di-Pertuan Agong verifies the nomination. Tan Sri Abu Talib Othman retired on Sunday after serving 13 years in the post.

deputy president will be considered for the post as is the tradition, he said: "There is nothing to bar me. I can fall back on tradition or I can fall forward."

To a question on a possible Cabinet reshuffle after the Umno polls, he said as Prime Minister, he can call for a reshuffle anytime as it is not related to the party elections.

Wanita Umno head Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, who attended the meeting, said Dr Mahathir had given a message that should stir the conscience of Umno members in general and the delegates in particular.

"His advice must be the basis and core of the direction for Umno members in carrying out the party's struggles," she said.

Other Umno leaders also hailed Dr Mahathir's advice to delegates to safeguard Umno's solidarity and credibility as the nation's paramount political party, saying this is timely and very appropriate.

Umno Youth chief Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, an aspirant to one of the three elected vice-presidents'

posts, said Dr Mahathir's advice is good and he hopes Umno members will place party interest above their own.

Another aspirant to the post of vice-president, Johor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, said he shares Dr Mahathir's views that all candidates in the party polls should be judged on their performance, capabilities and record.

Incumbent party vice-president Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi described Dr Mahathir's speech as good and proper.

Deputy Kelantan Umno liaison chief Datuk Annuar Musa said Dr Mahathir's advice — that there should not be any team for the elections, to avoid factionalism in the party — is good.

"His reminder that money politics will eventually destroy the party's image should be heeded," he said.

Negri Sembilan Menteri Besar Tan Sri Mohd Isa Abdul Samad said: "Dr Mahathir's intention is clear ... he wants the party elections to be conducted smoothly and held in the true spirit of Umno."