

# Dr M: Factionalism can ruin party

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KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday reminded Umno members against electing party leaders out of their loyalty to an individual or a "faction" leader.

The Umno president said while democracy in the party would guarantee its integrity would not be affected, the election of a leader must be based on the character of a candidate, the person's abilities and other qualities deemed necessary for the person to be leader.

"If an election is not based on individual loyalty or factions, then after leaders are elected, the party will be united again.

"Thus, the party will continue to be strong and able to handle problems in the party, Gov-

ernment and country," he said in his presidential address at the Umno special assembly here.

"The party is important. Individuals are not.

"An individual comes and goes but the party remains.

"The struggle will not end just because of the failure of an individual but the struggle of the party will end when the party is destroyed.

"We must remember that in politics there are no permanent friends or permanent enemies.

"There is no guarantee that in an election we will support the same candidate," he added.

Dr Mahathir also reminded members that Umno's strength came from their unity and loyalty to the party and its consti-

tution.

"A party cannot function if it is disorganised and its leaders are not fully supported.

"When a leader has been appointed, full support must be given to that person and this is the only way to determine the party's integrity.

"Cronyism and factionalism should not exist in the party. If this is practised the party will be split and weakened," he added.

Malaysia was successful in having a government with integrity because of the Umno formula of working with other political parties and the key to all this was that Umno was a party with integrity, he said.

"When Umno was founded there was no admission that the chairman or president had

the right to be prime minister.

"Umno's success in elections has given the opportunity to the leadership of Umno to hold the post.

"It has become a tradition to the point that many believe that it is important to be the president of Umno.

"The post of prime minister will follow naturally," he said.

Dr Mahathir said while according to tradition the Umno president had the right to become the prime minister, this would only hold true if Umno won the general election.

"Will Umno continue to win elections and lead the Barisan Nasional?"

"Will Barisan continue to accept Umno if the party is weak? Will Barisan continue to win the majority of seats in ev-

ery election?" he asked.

He said members must maintain the culture of giving importance to the struggle of the party and not to the interest of certain candidates.

"Some may be of the opinion that their candidate is so good that if the candidate fails to make it then the party itself has failed.

"That may be true. But if in the process of ensuring the success of the candidate the party is sacrificed, then the idolisation of the candidate will not produce anything," he said.

The Prime Minister said the important thing was not to be overzealous in ensuring the success of a candidate, adding that if the candidate failed to make it, then they should be

able to accept the winner, the choice of the majority.

On the amendments to the party constitution, he said they were to protect the party from possible abuse of democracy.

Dr Mahathir said the amendments were intended to prevent practices which could divide and weaken the party.

He said this was not the first time Umno was amending its constitution, adding that change was necessary to ensure that the party did not remain stagnant but moved with the times and developments.

He also said that it was not the constitution which ensured the preservation and authority of Umno but rather it was the members' understanding and wisdom in using the constitution which would ensure this.