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Dr M: Not a time for contests

KUALA SELANGOR, Sat. - Party members who want to bring about changes in the party leadership should defer their intentions until the country recovers from its economic problems, Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

Dr Mahathir said bitter contests at a time when the country was facing economic problems would only cause a split in the party and impede the Government's efforts to revive the economy.

"Although many would say that there should be changes in the party leadership, these changes, if needed, can be brought about later," he said when opening the Kuala Selangor Umno division meeting.

Dr Mahathir said Umno was not out to stop any member from trying to bring about changes to the party.

But changes at this time, he added, would not only divide and weaken the party but would also thwart efforts to improve the livelihood of the Malays.

"What is crucial today is for Umno to remain united and strong because we are now dealing with new attempts to 'colonialise' us. Attempts are being made (by external forces) so that we will lose the power to determine the policies of our country."

Dr Mahathir said in their eagerness to secure high positions in the party, some members not only resorted to dirty tactics such as money politics but also ignored Umno's struggle for the Malays, the very basis of its inception.

"Sadly, some self-serving members supported those who were corrupt, not realising that these corrupt leaders may also hold positions in the Government and use their power for selfish interests," Dr Mahathir said to the applause of about 1,000 delegates and members of the Kuala Selangor Umno division.

Dr Mahathir said the supreme council's decision that members of the council who were incumbent divisional chiefs should not be challenged for the divisional positions was not undemocratic.

"In fact, it is to ensure that democracy is not abused. When there is no election, there will be no money politics, or rather, there will be less money politics. We must educate ourselves to reject negative inclinations."

To strike a balance, the council also decided that incumbent division chiefs should not be challenged.

Dr Mahathir said another reason for the supreme council to make such a decision was to avoid a split within the party.

He said although elections were meant for the candidates to gauge whether they had support, more often than not such challenges turned bitter and that the winners and the losers ended up being enemies.

"The losing side will not only isolate themselves but also betray and weaken the party," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the anger and animosity would prolong until the general election which would see the losers in divisional polls refusing to support party candidates contesting in the constituency.

"In such a situation, the party candidate will lose the election because he has been denied support. This means the party has lost."

He reminded members to understand democracy and pick candidates useful to the party rather than those who were only of service to themselves or

their supporters.

Also present at the meeting were Dr Mahathir's wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, and Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Abu Hassan Omar, who is also Kuala Selangor Umno division chief.

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