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`Party ready to face polls and win'

UMNO president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday he was convinced that Umno was now prepared to face the next general election and win, saying that party members now understood the reasons for Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's sacking.

"The delegates were unusually receptive because they are now no longer confused over the issue. Umno is now solid," he said at a Press conference at the end of the Umno general assembly.

Dr Mahathir said the party would now move forward and prepare for the general election.

However, he said Anwar's current sodomy trial made it difficult to hold election because party members would not be able to talk about the issue.

He said it would be contemptuous to speak about the issue.

"But it will be held if we have to," he said.

Anwar was sacked as Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister on Sept 2 last year, and subsequently expelled from the party on moral grounds.

Dr Mahathir said Barisan Nasional was also ready to face the general election even if the coalition had to face the opposition candidates on a one-to-one basis.

"One-to-two or one-to-three doesn't matter to us. We will take on everybody," he said in his usual light-hearted manner.

The Prime Minister was asked if the BN was prepared to take on the Opposition on a one-to-one basis in the coming general election.

Penang Parti Keadilan Nasional (Keadilan) liaison chief Dr Mansor Othman was quoted as saying that the Opposition parties had agreed that only one candidate representing them would be fielded against the BN candidate representing Umno.

The opposition pact consists of DAP, Pas, Keadilan and PRM.

Dr Mahathir said that based on the party's just concluded general assembly, the members were now more spirited and determined to defend and champion the party.

On what Umno's election strategy would be, he replied: "Strategy to win."

More than 2,000 Umno delegates attended the assembly, the last for this century.

Dr Mahathir was also asked by a foreign reporter on what he thought about the action of some Umno members putting up his posters all over PWTC.

"I am afraid that this may backfire because some people may be fed up. But they are very insistent and I have no say.

"In fact, when I was made Education Minister, the first thing I did was to stop schools from putting up my pictures."

(END)