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Dr M: Restore support for the party

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UMNO president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the people's support for the party would erode if members became too pre-occupied jostling for positions and pursuing self interests.

He said Umno had to accept that there were quite a number of people who were actually fed up with the party due to the behaviour of its members.

"What they see in Umno is its members jostling for positions and using money to gain posts. All these have eroded their confidence in Umno. If we do not behave and make changes, the people will feel more alienated and Umno will lose more support," he said.

The Prime Minister was speaking at a press conference at the end of the first day of the party's general assembly at Putra World Trade Centre.

Dr Mahathir was asked to elaborate on his presidential speech earlier where he told delegates that members did not seem to care for what the people thought of the party, but were intent on pursuing their own self interests.

He felt members should try through actions, moderation and humanity to restore support for the party.

Asked how he viewed this year's election, Dr Mahathir replied that it had seen a record number of candidates.

"Everybody wants to become a supreme council member and to become one, they don't mind what they do.

"When we say they can't campaign, they got very annoyed.

"But the people are watching us. When they see us so obsessed (for positions) they become fed up with our obsession."

On the steps needed to correct this, Dr Mahathir said Umno members should behave, especially after performing badly in the last general election.

"We should be focusing on how to help the party become more popular but all we can see is members becoming obsessed about wanting to be elected to the council that they just don't care what they do, using money and unhealthy campaigning.

"As a result, the party does not regain any support."

Dr Mahathir was also asked on the need to again raise matters about the sacking of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim from the Government and party.

This, he said, was done because the issue had been exploited by the Opposition in the general election.

"They had used it effectively, especially the black eye incident."

(Anwar was assaulted by former Inspector-General of Police while in police custody).

"We cannot just ignore this as if it had not happened. The fact is that some people still remember that black eye."

He said some people were of the opinion that Anwar had been removed from office in an unfair manner, and naturally blamed Umno for it.

Dr Mahathir was asked whether it was true that Pas had known about Anwar's behaviour much earlier and why it had chosen not to capitalise on the matter.

"I don't know but when Anwar was still in the Government, Mohamad Sabu (Pas MP for Kuala Kedah) in his speeches had referred to Anwar as 'Datuk Seri Anwar AlJuburi'. I think you know what this means."

Asked to comment on his re-election as party president, Dr Mahathir said one should not be too taken up by the strong endorsement.

"I thank members for this but sentiments change. People may later decide differently," he said.

On whether he considered the issue of succession had been carried out smoothly following his re-election as president and Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi as deputy president, Dr Mahathir said:

"People might get elected but they may not be holding on to the posts forever. In the next election, delegates may change their minds, even about the president and deputy president's posts."

Dr Mahathir was also asked about democracy and how much it was understood by the people.

Although the people could grasp the concept, many, including intelligent people, were ignorant of the details.

For example, although the people had the right to express their feelings, that did not mean that they could hold demonstrations as they like as this could create instability and lead the country into anarchy, he added.

"One must not think that democracy will always provide the best solution to problems, just because it is democracy."

Asked about the employment situation among Malays, Dr Mahathir said it was true and they had a preference for easy jobs.

When this happened, he said it was unavoidable that others would then take over the "difficult" jobs, causing the Malays to lose their grip in certain fields.

Asked if the Government would ban political parties from including words related to any religion in their names, Dr Mahathir said no decision had been made on it yet although many such calls had been made before.

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