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PM confident delegates will elect clean and able leaders

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IN THE run-up to party elections, Umno president and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has expressed confidence that delegates to Umno's 54th general assembly will elect leaders that are free from corruption and who will work hard for their race, religion and country.

He said they will be leaders who do not think of only themselves.

"I am confident that this time, a majority of those elected will be people who are more clean and not involved in unwanted practices," Dr Mahathir said at a press conference after a closed-door briefing to Umno leaders and delegates in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

The Umno general assembly begins today with the Youth and Wanita joint assemblies, followed by the general assembly from tomorrow to Saturday. This year's assembly will include the election of Umno supreme council members.

A total of 82 candidates are vying for 32 seats on the Umno Supreme Council. The Wanita Umno election will see 52 candidates against 19 posts, while for the Umno Youth election there are 19 posts with 61 candidates.

Dr Mahathir acknowledged that Umno members appear to be chasing after posts in the party, a culture which was not that apparent before.

He attributed it to the changing Malay culture itself, where rapid urbanisation and modernisation have exposed Malays to more freedom yet also made them more self-centred.

Asked what he told the delegates during the more than one-hour briefing, Dr Mahathir said he reminded them of the history and philosophy of Umno's struggle, and to learn from the mistakes of political parties in other countries that had fought for independence but today no longer have the people's support.

"Some Umno members, because they are new, do not really understand the party's history and philosophy. If they know, they do not know enough, and have veered away from the basic principle of fighting for the race, religion and homeland," Dr Mahathir said.

He said Umno's image at present has been slightly affected, and that the party should work towards regaining the image it had when Umno was first established to gain independence.

"At the time, everyone felt responsible for the future of the country, religion and race. They did not give priority to holding top posts for themselves. In fact, some of them normally rejected posts because they felt they were not eligible.

"Nowadays, although some have pulled out, many still want to contest for posts. They are all eligible, but we want the competition to be held in a friendly manner," Dr Mahathir added.

Asked about his promise to expose those who indulge in money politics for the party elections, the Umno president said he will only make a statement when there is sufficient evidence.

"At the same time, if there are any suspicions but not enough evidence, there are other ways we can act. There are a few (incidences of money politics), but these are not done directly, and are difficult to pin-point," he said.

Dr Mahathir said because there are so many candidates vying for a limited number of seats, it is unfair to say that those who lost were rejected because they had indulged in money politics.

"We cannot say that. There will be those who lose because there are not

enough seats. So we cannot blame them," he added.

Asked how many more times he will give Umno members a "wake-up" call in his speeches, Dr Mahathir said: "Until they wake up. There are those who have woken up for a while, but fallen asleep again, so we have to shake them up."

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