

Dr Mahathir: It's Malay Dilemma II

'Work hard, close ranks and behave, or you'd lose'

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DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday said the multitude of problems faced by the Malays now can be likened to "Malay Dilemma II".

"Yep!" said the Prime Minister when asked if the concerns he had raised in his presidential address could be likened to a second *Malay Dilemma*, a book he wrote on the problems faced by the Malays in the early 70s.

"No, I am not desperate, but as a leader it is my duty to warn the people about what would happen if they do certain things.

"That was the gist of my speech," he told a Press conference at the end of the first day of the Umno general assembly.

The Umno president was responding to a question from a foreign journalist, who asked if he was desperate over the situation affecting the Malays.

Elaborating on his speech, Dr Mahathir said the Malays should work hard, failing which they would face a lot of problems.

Maybe, he said, it was a dilemma.

"I also told them quite plainly that they should shape up or they would lose out.

"It is the same message given by my deputy (Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi)... that unless they close ranks and behave, we may lose," he said.

The Prime Minister, who has been in office for 20 years, was also

asked about his retirement plans by another foreign journalist.

His reply was: "It is a very difficult question to answer. It is not only my decision. If I had my way, I would have stepped down in 1998.

"But circumstances did not allow me to do so then, and now I am caught here."

While some people would like to see him "disappear or disintegrate", Dr Mahathir said there were others who insisted that he should stay on.

"If you listen to the debate today, there seems to be quite some support for me. Because of that, I have to find the right time to step down."

In jest, Dr Mahathir said he had wanted to step down to please "our foreign detractors", but felt it was not that easy as he had a responsibility.

On whether he would lead Barisan Nasional in the next general election, Dr Mahathir quipped:

"I don't know ... I may be sick or dead, I may be rejected by my party ... I don't know."

Asked by another foreign journalist if there should be changes in Umno, Dr Mahathir said changes would always occur democratically in the party.

He added that Umno did not want members to resort to street demonstrations to overthrow the present party leadership.

Asked if the Government's affirmative action for Bumiputeras

would be made permanent, he said it was a safety net of sorts.

"I don't think it will be because once there is no necessity, it would be stopped.

"The policy is aimed at helping Bumiputeras achieve a certain target and beyond, on their own, and if they succeed the policy will be scrapped," he said.

Asked if his position in Umno was strong and whether the detention (of opposition members) under the Internal Security Act was an over-reaction, Dr Mahathir said:

"The detention has nothing to do with Umno."

The ISA, he stressed, was for the security of the nation.

Explaining the matter, he said there were some people in the country who would like to see Malaysia in a turmoil as they had seen in other countries.

"This is because they cannot win the elections... so they thought they could bring down the Government by staging street demonstrations.

"If they want, they can get the support from the people in the next election because elections are fair.

"They also know Opposition parties in Malaysia can win as in the case of the two States (Kelantan and Terengganu)," he said.

He added that the Government had never stopped any member of the Opposition from contesting any parliamentary or State seats.

"They are quite free in this country, but why do they need to resort to street demonstrations which will only affect the poor hawkers the most?"

"We are looking after the interest of the majority who prefer a peaceful Malaysia.

"If these people create problems for others, they will be detained under the laws of the country," he said.

Asked for his opinion if Pas was still interested to meet with Umno on the proposed unity talks, Dr Mahathir said:

"I think they fear that they would lose the support of the non-Malays if they talk to us."

He said it seemed as if Pas was not interested in holding the dialogue (with Umno), "although we think we have common interests and Umno is sincere about the talks".

"I also think they are not sincere as they keep coming up with conditions for the proposed talks," said Dr Mahathir.

"Pas just wants to gain political mileage from its actions."

On his challenge to Pas to reveal its form of Islamic State if the Opposition party came to power, Dr Mahathir said: "I want them to spell out in writing, in Chinese, what they meant by an Islamic State."

Asked if Pas was scared, Dr Mahathir said: "If so, Pas should admit it."