

Don't fight for positions, Dr M tells members

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'Understand Umno's early struggle'

By Zubaidah Abu Bakar and Sharanjit Singh

YAN, Tues. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has advised Umno members to avoid actions that will further divide them, especially during the upcoming divisional elections. The party president also reiterated his call for members to remain united.

The advice was given at a closed-door gathering with top leaders from 264 branches in Yan and Pendang divisions at Sekolah Menengah Agama Yan in Titi Serong, near here today.

Pendang division chief Datuk Othman Abdul and his counterpart in Yan division, Datuk Badruddin Amiruddin, said the gathering and dialogue had cleared a lot of misunderstanding and misconceptions.

"Those who raised questions were very frank and open. We even had a question concerning the purchase of MAS shares by the Government.

"Some of them already knew the answers to their questions but wanted to hear explanations from Dr Mahathir. The response was good from the floor. Requests from several people to ask questions had to be turned down due to time constraints," Othman said.

Badruddin said such open discussion should be held more often as grassroots leaders had always wanted an opportunity for direct

contact with the party president.

Five representatives — three of whom were from Yan division — posed questions to Dr Mahathir during the 40-minute dialogue.

The questions ranged from Umno and Malay unity to ways to counter Pas allegations against the Umno president.

This is the first gathering between the Umno president and branch leaders in Kedah.

He had earlier meetings with branch leaders in Padang Terap, Pokok Sena, Sik and Baling divisions during two separate open sessions in Pokok Sena and Sik last month. But a dialogue was only held at the gathering with Sik and Baling divisions.

The gathering between Dr Mahathir and grassroots leaders is part of a series of gatherings planned nationwide.

It is intended to be an exchange of views between Dr Mahathir and grassroots leaders to chart plans on what needs to be done to strengthen the party in the State.

Later at a Press conference in Bukit Kayu Hitam, Dr Mahathir said Umno members were in general united.

"Generally, it is good but there is disunity here and there," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he had stressed the importance of unity in Umno at the closed-door meeting in Yan.

"There should be no fights for positions, power, etc...," he said when asked for his message to grassroots

leaders.

Dr Mahathir said he told the branch representatives to return to basics and understand Umno's struggles.

"We went through Umno's early struggles, on how Umno had been able to unite the Malays who were too weak to go against the British and protest the setting up of the Malayan Union.

"(They were told) if the Malays are united, then we will be strong."

On the proposed Umno-Pas unity talks, Dr Mahathir said it would be good if the two parties could talk about common problems, especially those faced by the Malays.

"It is not a trap set by Umno... We just think it would be good for us to meet," he said, adding that Umno wanted to raise matters related to Malay unity during the talks.

"There will not be national unity if Malays in the country are divided... The division between Malays in Umno and Pas is wide and deep."

Asked how solutions could be arrived at when the two parties differed in political beliefs, Dr Mahathir said:

"Of course, we have different political beliefs but when the interests of the Malays are at stake, it has become a common problem."

On whether he thinks the proposed talks will take place, Dr Mahathir said it is 50:50.

"We are working towards it, we pray it will materialise."