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Dr M: Stop this sickness (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today warned Puteri Umno members not to indulge in slanderous allegations of the sort that have plagued their seniors.

The Prime Minister said although this political malaise was not widespread in the year-old movement, it should not be allowed to grow.

"I hope the sickness which afflicted the older generation in Umno will not spread to the younger generation," the Umno president said when opening Puteri Umno's inaugural general assembly at the Putra World Trade Centre here.

Dr Mahathir said Puteri Umno members should concentrate on the party's struggle and understand Umno's politics.

He said he noticed that these unhealthy traits had found their way into the young movement in the run-up to its maiden elections, and reminded the members to reject such a culture.

"When there are elections, we see problems which have afflicted the older generation (in Umno) spreading to the younger generation in Puteri Umno.

"We see unhealthy activities among the Puteri members.

"Thank God (the problem) is not big," he said, adding that this was why there was one contender who

swept nominations from all the divisions for the Puteri Umno chief's post.

Dr Mahathir said that while Umno did not prevent contests for posts, the process should be carried out systematically and with decorum.

"We do not condone crime. Whatever crime is committed by a person, he or she will have to face action. But a person is innocent until proven guilty."

Dr Mahathir said when a person was accused of wrong-doing in party elections, the impression was that such allegations were made for political interests.

"This does not mean that because there are political interests involved, a crime is condoned. A crime is still a crime, but political matters should be resolved politically."

Dr Mahathir said there should be no move to resort to channels outside politics to advance any political cause.

"By right, if we do not enjoy the support of the majority, we should end the fight," he said.

Stating that he held to the principle that there should be punishment for an offence committed, he said the country's legal system was such that a person was innocent until proven guilty.

"If they take part in politics, they should be given a chance," he added.

Later at a Press conference, Dr Mahathir denied that the party's supreme council was protecting Puteri Umno pro-tem chief Azalina Othman Said.

"A crime is a crime. But to condemn a person because somebody makes an accusation is being unfair because we can all make accusations.

"We all commit some sins, but prove it," he said.

Azalina, who was attacked over her alleged sexual preference and mismanagement of Puteri Umno during the run-up to the movement's elections, won the post uncontested.

Dr Mahathir also reminded Puteri Umno members that understanding Umno's struggle would enable them to contribute to the Malay race, religion and

country.

"If we do not have the knowledge or we are in the party for self-interest, then the party will be destroyed.

"If the younger generation destroys the party, there will be no future for the party," he added.

He said Umno realised the importance of involving young people in the party and decided to set up Puteri Umno to complement Umno Youth.

Puteri Umno was declared a new entity of Umno on June 20.

Dr Mahathir said Puteri Umno, while still in its infancy, had proven itself as an important entity of Umno, working actively for the party.

"Puteri Umno has been very active, so much so that the Opposition feels the movement is a threat."

Dr Mahathir, however, reminded Puteri Umno members to strike a balance between their roles in the party and their responsibilities to their families.

They should not only be active in politics, but also promote a new culture to ensure the future generation is more progressive.

More than 600 Puteri Umno delegates attended the one-day assembly, which saw the election of the movement's posts for chairman and deputy chairman as well as the 20 executive council seats.

Pro-tem secretary Noraini Ahmad won the deputy chief's post uncontested when two other aspirants withdrew.

Also present were Umno deputy president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, vice-presidents Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin and Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib, Umno Youth chief Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein, and several supreme council members.

Wanita Umno was represented by its information chief Datin Paduka Seripah Norli Syed Hussein, treasurer Datin Azizah Abdul Samad and executive council members.

Wanita Umno chief Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz and deputy chief Datuk Shahrizat Abdul Jalil are abroad on official duties.