

# Bickering can harm Umno, says Dr M

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**KUALA LUMPUR:** Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad expressed concern over the bickering within Umno as it could cause the party to lose out.

The Umno president and Prime Minister said there was always "that potential" for bickering within the party when there was an opportunity to lead and get into positions of power.

In response to a question posed in an interview aired on CNBC last night, Dr Mahathir said he was not worried that extremist Muslim opinion in the country could be brought about by a war in Iraq because Muslims here were generally "very rational" about Islam and knew the true teachings of the religion.

"But what I am worried about perhaps is bickering within my own party and we would lose by default. Not because the other side (PAS) is stronger."

On whether there was a potential for such bickering in Umno, Dr Mahathir said:

"There is always that potential when there is an opportunity to lead the party (and) to get into a position that is very attractive, there will be some contestants."

Dr Mahathir said he believed his successor Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi would continue with the policies set by his (the Mahathir) administration.

"I think he may improve on it in terms of implementation and getting greater commitment

from Malays and non-Malays," he added.

Dr Mahathir was also asked whether his stepping down as Prime Minister was cause for concern because there would then no longer be strong leaders in the South-East Asian region.

"Unless there is a change, people are not going to know whether there can be more strong leaders in the future.

"If I am here all the time, people will assume that I am a strong leader.

"I don't look at myself as a strong leader.

"I look at myself as a person who has been given a responsibility and I try to carry out my responsibility as best I can," he said.

On whether there would be threats that would need to be dealt with in the transition period, Dr Mahathir said that would be up to the new leadership to handle.

He reiterated his stand that leaders should step down to allow Abdullah the opportunity to appoint his own team when he took over.

On the decision to teach Mathematics and Science in English, Dr Mahathir said this was not something he did on his own as it was made after discussions with "colleagues".

"I did not want to leave problems behind," he said, adding that there was no harm modifying old policies to adapt to new situations.

Dr Mahathir also said he was satisfied with what he had achieved so far but not fully satisfied.