

Money politics hurting Umno's image, says Mahathir

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BY MERGAWATI ZULFAKAR

KUALA LUMPUR: Money politics in Umno will not be eradicated unless firm action is taken against those who practise it and members expose the culprits, said former Umno president Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Dr Mahathir, who expressed his frustration over the silence of members who refused to name the culprits, even during his term as party president, said money politics was hurting the party's image and feared that professionals would stay away from Umno.

"I hear that Malay professionals are not going to join Umno because they think it is a corrupt party.

"(Talking about it) definitely will hurt the party's image. But if you don't talk and the thing goes on, it is bad also. If you talk, you must be prepared to do something about it."

In an exclusive interview with *The Star* almost a year after stepping down as Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir said money politics was already a subject in Umno in the 70s.

"There were people who came to me before I was elected vice-president, telling me that if I gave them money, they were prepared to give me a bloc vote.

"I said it was all right, 'if I don't win, I don't win.' That is why I very nearly lost as vice-president. I was number three, very far down," he added.

He said the scourge was getting

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worse with everyone saying that even the three-year-old Puteri Umno wing members were involved.

"Unfortunately, everybody talks about money politics, everybody says it is rampant, that even Puteri is involved. But no one wants to say who. And they know who," he added.

Dr Mahathir also said that two of the

most senior people who lost had claimed that they knew who he culprits were but declined to reveal the identities for fear of hurting "their friends."

"Now if you are thinking about your friends, then of course let's not talk about money politics. But if you are thinking about the nation, the people, the morality of the people, the success

or failure of the people, whether we elect corrupt leaders or not, we must start, we must say 'He is the one who gave'."

Asked whether his successor Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi could stop money politics, he replied: "Only if people are prepared to name names."

Dr Mahathir also spoke on a wide

range of other issues including his speaking engagements abroad, his family, his so-called influence on decision-making and why so many Malay entrepreneurs "learn nothing" despite all the help given to them.

■ See Pages 28 to 30 for part one of the interview. Part two will appear tomorrow.