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`Create no-contest mood'

reports on "Umno General Assembly 2003" by Sharif Haron; Noor Adzman UMNO president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday any scramble for the party's top posts next year can be avoided by creating a "no-contest mood" among members now.

With an atmosphere intolerant of bickering prevalent in the party, he said it would deter aspirants from pursuing the intention.

The Prime Minister said he believed those who wanted to contest would also not receive support from party members.

"(In Umno) we anticipate before it happens. We talk about it openly now so that it will not happen. If there is discord, those involved will feel uneasy as the mood in the party is one which opposes any form of bickering."

Speaking at a Press conference at the end of the first day of the Umno general assembly at the Putra World Trade Centre, Dr Mahathir said:

"I see the strong spirit shown by delegates. They supported the call for no-contest and to support Pak Lah (deputy president and Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi).

"Their speeches focused on the general election and for the first time, everyone touched on Pas and how the party has exploited Islam for political gain and deviated from the true teachings of the religion."

To a suggestion that Umno should capitalise on this unity and that the general election should be held as soon as possible, the Prime Minister replied: "I think we can sustain the mood ... it is a permanent mood."

Asked whether he was confident Umno would perform better in the next general election, including recapturing Kelantan and Terengganu in view of the renewed unity in the party, Dr Mahathir said:

"Yes, I am confident that we will do much better than 1999. That much I can assure you."

When pointed out that some speakers at the assembly had gone overboard in praising him, Dr Mahathir said he preferred to view that from a different perspective.

"I have always said there is no need to praise me but I cannot stop them. I view it as an indirect show of confidence in the party.

"They praise the leadership of the party and not me personally ... it is as the leader of the party."

To a question on the possibility of him resigning as Umno president but remaining as Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir replied in the negative.

"No, no possibility ...I have said I will relinquish all posts in the party, Barisan Nasional and the Government and I will do just that."

On one occasion during his presidential speech when he was overcome by emotion, Dr Mahathir said he did not cry. "No, I did not (shed tears). I worked very hard not to do it and I succeeded."

Asked whether he was sad to leave the party and Government, Dr Mahathir said he was overcome by emotion when reciting prayers for the party and race.