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Dr Mahathir's thoughts on Malays and Umno in interview

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AHEAD of the Umno general assembly on Wednesday, Minggu Malaysia yesterday carried an exclusive interview with party president and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, with the focus on two major issues - Umno and the Malays.

The assembly this year is significant as it will be the last to be attended by Dr Mahathir as president.

More significantly, in the interview which was front-paged by the newspaper, Dr Mahathir expressed concern that several top posts would be contested in the party election next year, namely the positions of deputy president and (three) vice-presidents.

Such contests, he reasoned, could destabilise the party.

The Prime Minister, however, said he did not think his successor, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, would be challenged.

"I don't think Pak Lah will be challenged. I will be very sad if this happens," he was quoted.

On the possibility of Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah and Tan Sri Musa Hitam making a comeback for the president's post, Dr Mahathir said: "I don't think that will happen. If they do it, they will lose."

Dr Mahathir also spoke, among others, on the future of the Malays, efforts to change their mindset, protecting the rights of the community and also his plans after retirement.

In another story, Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said he was not aware of any plans to build a floating airport in Pulau Tioman which could cost up to RM20 billion.

The paper quoted him as remarking "it is possible?" when asked whether the project, submitted by Joharbaru Corporation Berhad, a company with an address in Taman Setiawangsa, Kuala Lumpur, had been approved by the Government.

The company recently briefed a group of travel writers and tour agents who visited the island about the project, and claimed it had received approval.

Berita Minggu, meanwhile, reported the views of Malaysian Music Industry Academy chairman Aziz Bakar on calls for recording companies and production houses to reduce the prices of VCDs, CDs and cassettes as one way of combating piracy.

Aziz said the move was laudable but it would not totally eradicate piracy.

"Let's say original CDs and VCDs are sold at RM15, they will then sell the pirated items at RM3."

Aziz said the pirates could do this as their production costs were low as they did not have to pay royalty to the artistes, composers and for studio rentals.

Berita Harian on Saturday carried a story on Mara giving out loans totalling RM600 million this year benefiting some 20,000 students, especially those at private universities and colleges.

To date, the agency has financed a total of 50,000 students.

Mara director-general Datuk Zamani Mohd Noor was quoted as saying that the interest-free loans had managed to ease the burden of students.

He said Mara was only allocated RM200 million for education but the amount was raised to RM600 million due to the increase in university fees.

On another matter, Zamani said Mara would only publish in newspapers the

names of loan defaulters who owed the agency RM20,000 and more. It planned to take up four advertisements this year to publish the names.