

Let smart people rise in politics, says Mahathir

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By Lawrence Yong

Political party leaders should not overstay their welcome but instead encourage young people, who are smarter than them to rise up the ranks, Umno's longest-serving former president said today.

Without referring to any party, Dr Mahathir Mohamad said that, if leaders are afraid of their intelligent underlings, that party would become "a stupid party" over time and lose its standing.

"We must accept that it is a good thing that more intelligent people join the party and leadership quality will improve over time - or you will have more and more stupid people," Mahathir told some 600 youths at a talk at the International Youth Centre.

He explained the problem in detail.

"Those at the lowest ranks don't like anybody more intelligent than them. They think the best thing to do is to stop intelligent people from coming in...

"Only people more stupid than them can come into the party... so, over time, when the leaders die, the leadership becomes stupider."

Mahathir also dished out two pieces of timely advice, possibly aimed at next month's Umno elections, where six people are contesting for three posts of vice-president, five are battling for the Youth chief's post and three for the position of Wanita chief.

NONE"Accept people more intelligent than you ... lose gracefully and you will be remembered," he said.

Speaking to reporters later, Mahathir declined to mention his favourites, not even his own son Mukhriz (left), the Kedah menteri besar who is going for a vice-presidency.

"It's up to him, and the assessment of him by the others ... If I have to advise him, I can talk to him, not give advice in public," he said.

'Healthy competition'

Mahathir was ambivalent about the level of competition in Umno for posts this year.

NONE"I was expecting more people to contest. Obviously, they felt they are unable to win, so they decided not to contest," Mahathir said as a veiled poke at his former archrival Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah (right).

He said that competition in Umno is "healthy".

"If no contest, then it's very bad. Then people will (ask) 'where is the transformation?'"

Asked if he is happy that the top two posts - Najib Abdul Razak as president and Muhyiddin as his deputy - were returned unopposed, he said he welcomes this.

"This means that there will be a loss of possibility of a split in the party. If no contest, the party remains solid, " Mahathir said, and again vaguely referred to Tengku Razaleigh saying that previous losers for the presidency had gone on to form their own parties.

sanusi junid 050608Mahathir laughed heartily when asked if Akhramsyar Muammar Ubaidah Sanusi, the son of his loyalist Sanusi Junid (left), is his proxy in a fight against Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's son-in-law for the Umno Youth head.

"Everybody is my proxy," he said in jest.

Reporters pressed him for an assessment of incumbent Umno Youth head Khairy Jamaluddin.

"I don't know what he stands for ... If you want to choose you must look at his background and character," he said.

He added that no Umno members should vote for anyone based on his preference or otherwise.

