I like being told where I've gone wrong – Mahathir

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INTERVIEW | The world may view him as an authoritarian leader but Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad has revealed that he welcomed constructive feedback to improve himself.

In a special media interview to mark Pakatan Harapan's first anniversary in government, Mahathir said he personally has not felt any backlash, beyond what was reported by a critical press.

"I like being told where I'm wrong, where I'm weak so that I can correct myself," said Mahathir who earned the label "dictator" from his detractors during his previous 22-year stint as the country's fourth prime minister.

The Harapan chairperson also said he has no stand on the accuracy of a Merdeka Centre March survey which recorded his approval rating at only 46 percent, down from 87 percent in May last year.

"I don’t know. I don't know whether it's correct or not correct […]," said Mahathir who noted that Merdeka Centre's final survey before polling day for the 14th general election had predicted a BN victory against Harapan.

"But what I do know is that people are not shooting at me, not taking potshots at me, except for the press and the critics.

"And I appreciate that," said Mahathir.

According to Merdeka Centre, the deterioration in public satisfaction was in tandem with the increase in the percentage of those polled - from 24 percent in August last year to 46 percent last month - who felt the country was "headed in the wrong direction."

The poll was conducted from March 5 to 11 and involved a pool of 1,204 voters aged 21 and above which the centre said was reflective of the national electoral profile.

'Not quite satisfied with Bersatu'

Mahathir had quit Umno in February 2016 after a falling out with then prime minister Najib Abdul Razak and he went on to form Bersatu several months later.

The bumiputera-only party soon became a new platform for disgruntled Umno leaders and members. However, it courted controversy when it started accepting Umno lawmakers who jumped ship after GE14.

Concerns were raised over Bersatu eventually transforming into an "Umno 2.0" if it failed to address legacy issues carted along by former Umno members.

Quizzed on his views on the party's performance so far, Mahathir as Bersatu chairperson said he was "not quite satisfied".

"Our membership is not very big. We also find that some practices are bad," he said.

"For example, if you are chosen as division chief, you might not want people to join because they will displace you.

"So better (for them) to have a small Bersatu than a big Bersatu," he noted, adding this resulted in the party not having much personnel when the time came to face by-elections.

Recounting his earlier days as an Umno politician, the 93-year-old lamented that people today were more self-serving compared to their predecessors.

"When we first started Umno, people doled out their own money. They did not ask for money, they did not ask for anything.

"That kind of thing doesn't happen now," he said, quickly adding that this was a problem not only in Bersatu but with most Malay-based parties.

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