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'Don't repeat 1988 debacle'

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KUALA LUMPUR: The debacle that saw Umno being declared illegal in 1988 during the leadership of former prime minister and Umno president Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad should not be allowed to be repeated.

As such, Information Minister Datuk Ahmad Shabery Cheek suggested that Dr Mahathir be careful when making public statements.

"I feel it would be appropriate if Tun (Dr Mahathir) exercised more caution in making statements because we don't want the demise, destruction and de-registration of Umno that occurred during his leadership to be repeated," he said after attending the Information Ministry's monthly assembly for the first time at Wisma Radio in Angkasapuri here yesterday.

He was commenting on the criticisms made by Dr Mahathir, who claimed that current members of the Umno supreme council were afraid to voice their opinions and convey a message to the party leadership.

Ahmad Shabery said during the former prime minister's leadership, many regulations were imposed, including a resolution that there should be no contest for the president and deputy president's posts.

"There was no contest (for the president's and deputy president's posts) after 1987 but now he is saying it is undemocratic. The Malays have

not forgotten all these things but maybe Dr Mahathir has forgotten.

"I am sad to bring up these things but the openness in Pak Lah's era should not be taken advantage of."

At one time, he said, Umno supreme council members couldn't even be challenged in their divisions.

Division chiefs in Kelantan also couldn't be opposed when Dr Mahathir was the state Umno liaison head, he said.

Ahmad Shabery added that the former Umno president had also reminded delegates

at the Umno general assembly in 1997 that any criticism of the party and its leadership could only be made through party branches, divisions and the supreme council.

"This is because if everyone starts criticising and condemning one another from outside the party, it will destroy the party. I worry if this happens, he (Dr Mahathir) will be the one considered to have destroyed Umno."

On calls to convene an extraordinary general meeting (EGM) to brainstorm Umno's dismal showing in the general

election, he said Dr Mahathir should not conclude that grassroots members were angry.

"We will see which branch wants to hold an EGM. Actually, there were no problems with the grassroots during the general election.

"The kampung folk in the agriculture sector were very happy with the high prices of rubber and oil palm. Only people living in urban areas voted against us."

He added that in the 1999 general election, the anger of the grassroots was aimed at

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*Datuk Ahmad Shabery Cheek
Information Minister*

