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Dr M: I will stop if leadership stops doing wrong things

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KUALA LUMPUR: Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he would stop criticising the Umno leadership "if they stop doing what is wrong which caused the bad election results".

"I will continue to talk as long as I am invited. I have no intention of becoming the Umno president or the Prime Minister. But as an Umno member and a citizen, I have the right to voice out," he said at a press conference after speaking at a forum "Bersatu Mermartabatkan Ketuanan Melayu" organised by Umno Pusat Bandar Taman Cempaka branch.

Earlier in Langkawi, Dr Mahathir said his criticism would make the party stronger.

"My criticisms will not wreck the party. If I tell lies, Umno will reject me. If they (supporters of current Umno leadership) tell the truth, people will accept them," he said when responding to allegations that his statements were providing "ammunition" for the Opposition.

Dr Mahathir said he has no favourite choice for Umno president.

"We can't be hasty in choosing a person. We have to wait and see if

they are brave or whether they can perform well.

"I said before that the Prime Minister's replacement is Najib (Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak).

"But I also said that it is better to wait and see who are the potential ones be it Najib, Ku Li (Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah) or an unknown contender but we must choose wisely.

"I should not commit or limit myself to anyone," Dr Mahathir said.

He also suggested that the president have a team of veteran and trained

Umno members to advise him.

On Umno president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's statement that he was responsible for the rot in the judiciary and lack of press freedom, Dr Mahathir said the media today was more restricted than before and forced to take orders on what they can or cannot write.

"The judiciary was not good then. What we did was to criticise to improve. If I did any wrong, then show what I did," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Umno leaders must be willing to swallow the bitter

pill if it meant they would get better.

"Be [unclear] in choosing your representatives for the annual general meeting and choose those who speak out. We may even need to replace some division chiefs with branch chiefs," he said.

Former Kedah Menteri Besar Tan Sri Sanusi Junid, who backed Dr Mahathir's criticism, said everyone should tackle the problem head-on.

"If the entire race is afraid, they look for philosophers or leaders but if the leader is afraid, then the race is lost," he added.