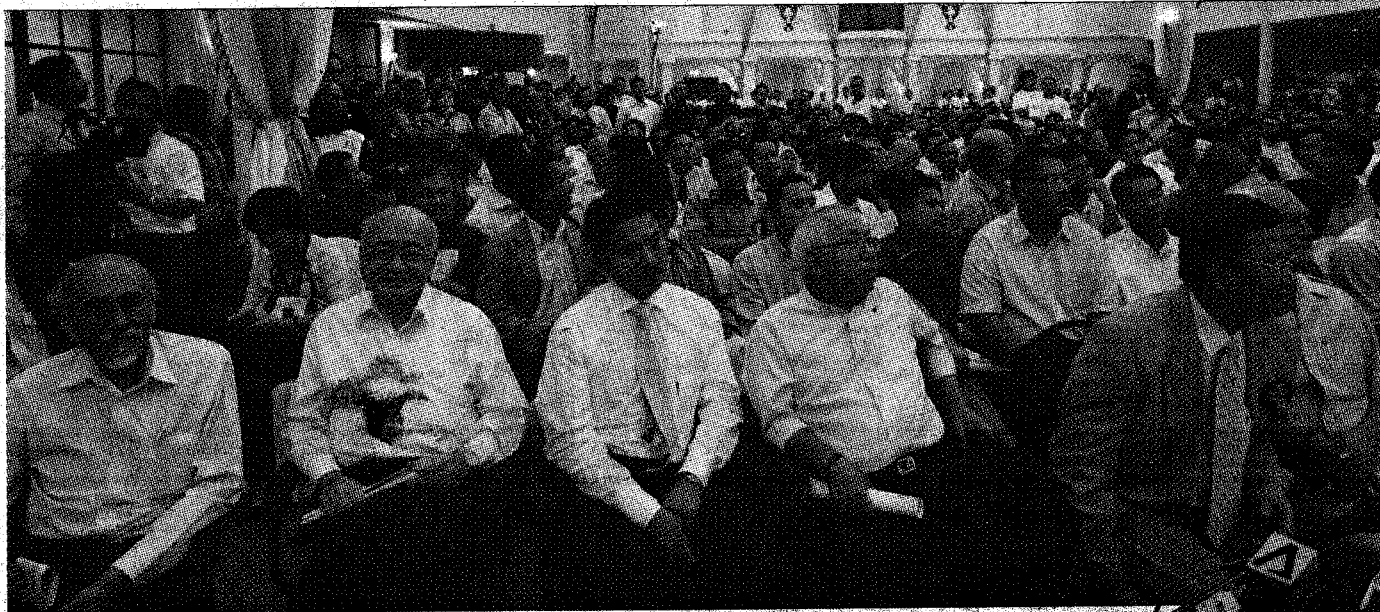


# Dr M urges open challenge for Umno leadership

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**PETALING JAYA:** Former premier Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday called for an open challenge for the Umno leadership, saying that members should be allowed to assess and evaluate a few candidates.

"I think we should not fix the successor, we should give chance to a few candidates so that we can assess and evaluate them before making our choice," he said when answering a question from the audience at a forum on Umno's post-election evaluation organised by Mykmu.net, a website set up by an Umno supporter group.

"Whether it is Pak Lah, Najib or Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, if the candidate is suitable, we support him."

"At the moment, I think it is not suitable for the party. He (should be the successor) is not changing my mind."

The question was whether he maintained his earlier stand that Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi should hand over the leadership to his deputy, Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak.

Mahathir also urged all Umno members to be brave to kick out "bad" leaders to save the party from being irrelevant. He said a lot of members have become "yes-men" to the current party leadership out of fear.

"We should not fear the leaders and not love the party. We must love our party and be brave to reject those who brought disaster to the party," he told his listeners, made up of mostly Umno members, including some former leaders.

Mahathir said the party had chosen a democratic system, not a feudal system, which allowed ordinary members to deny a leader who did no good to the party.

"It is a good system, which does not require revolution. However, when there is a member who dares to voice out his opinion, he will be accused of not respecting the leaders and this 'culture' should not have existed in a democratic system," he said.

He again called for Abdullah to step down and the party to hold an extraordinary general meeting (EGM) to explore the polls setback as well as amend the party constitution to abolish the nomination quota system that is

required for a candidate to contest in the party election that will start in July and culminating in the general assembly in December.

Mahathir also suggested the party have a presidential council to advise the party president and to limit his power. "If there is such a council, the first advice to the president should be to 'stop listening to the family,'" he said.

Present at the forum were Umno supreme council member and former Selangor menteri besar Datuk Seri Dr Mohd Khir Toyo, Umno Youth exco member Datuk Mukhriz Mahathir and Umno Johor publicity chief Dr Puan Zarkashi.

A grassroots leader who raised a question to the panel on why the party was not considering re-accepting Parti Keadilan Rakyat de facto leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim agitated the rest of the audience and was immediately escorted away by the organisers.

Mahathir addresses the forum, whose audience (top) consisted mostly of Umno members, including some former leaders.