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'Umno should address issues of perception'

UPHOLD IMAGE Dr Mahathir hopes the party will do more to counter indiscriminate accusations

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Umno leaders should step up efforts to reunite the Malays and put aside their own interests for the sake of the party and community, said former Umno president Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

In comments published yesterday ahead of next week's Umno general assembly, Dr Mahathir said Umno had to tackle the issue of Malay unity and the habit of *cantas-mencantas* (a form of political assassination) that was entrenched in the party.

"These matters have to be resolved by Umno," he said in an interview with *Mingguan Malaysia*.

Dr Mahathir expressed concerns over attempts to depict the party in negative terms, including indiscriminate accusations of corruption. Umno will have to counter allegations thrown at the party and hence, address issues of perception.

He said the party risked being weakened if Malays were not united while the individuals in the party jostled for positions.

"If they don't stop, the party will lose," he warned.

Dr Mahathir spoke of the party's successes such as in creating a breed of Malay entrepreneurs and professionals. This was achieved without neglecting the needs of the other races.

He said the biggest achievement of Barisan Nasional was in bringing the current level of progress that surpassed that of countries which attained independence at about the same time.

"Despite allegations of corruption, if it is true that BN had failed to administer, do you think we will live as comfortably as we are now? Did we not help the Chinese? If we look around us, their wealth are many times higher than the Malays."

He took a dig at Pas, saying that the party was willing to do anything to woo Chinese votes.

"This is to a level that they have forgotten their own struggles. This is clear when there were suggestions to focus on the welfare state and not on *hudud* (which had been their main struggle), there were no objections from them."

Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein, when asked to comment on Dr Mahathir's views, said Umno had undergone a

transformation after the 2008 general election but admitted that more efforts were needed ahead of the coming general election.

He was speaking after attending an address by party president Datuk Seri Najib Razak to Umno Youth and Puteri wings here.

He said knowing Dr Mahathir, it was not a surprise for him to throw challenges and ideas ahead of the

Umno general assembly to see if leaders and members would rise to his challenge.

"For me, (leaders fighting for their own interests), this is not something unique to Umno. I do not deny that this will hamper our efforts but we are going through a revision and transformation to ensure the party's continuity in the 13th general election."

Another Umno vice-president, Datuk Seri Mohd Shafie Apdal, said Umno had done a lot for the Malays but admitted that it was not easy to fulfil everybody's needs and desires.

"We have to improve in terms of the economy, education and religion. We have gone to the grassroots and done a lot in terms of financial aid and education through Mara, among others."

