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Party's struggles far from over, says Dr M

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KUALA LUMPUR: Umno's struggles are far from over and it needs to intensify its transformation plans for leaders and members to face the challenges ahead, said former party president Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

He said Umno leaders and members must remember that Malays had yet to reach the level where they could compete with other races and achieve success.

"We need a government that can defend our rights. We cannot think that our race is progressing well and that future generations no longer need help, such as scholarships.

"Our struggles are far from over. There is still a lot that needs to be done to make sure Malays can stand tall like other races," said the former prime minister, who had led Umno for 22 years.

He said this in an interview on TV3's *Soal Jawab* programme hosted by Datuk Ahmad A. Talib yesterday.

On the Umno general assembly, Dr Mahathir said the party should use the mammoth gathering to explain new policies that would be implemented by the government.

"The assembly is important so that we can get (members') approval (for all policies). At least, we know that all our actions are supported by Umno, the government and others."

On the lack of criticism during

debates by Umno delegates, Dr Mahathir said this could ruin the party.

"If leaders were wrong and went against the party's struggles, and the party did not follow what had been accepted by all, but, yet, there were no complaints, leaders would think that they what were doing was fine. This would aggravate matters.

"Criticisms must be made during party assemblies if members feel strongly about it for the betterment of Umno, Malays and the country.

"We must express our views to defend the policies and our stand."

He, however, warned party members to be wary of the opposition, who would look for ways to manipulate and exploit criticisms of party leaders.

"There are ways to do this without it being exploited by the opposition. The best option is to do it politely and with courtesy."

To another question, Dr Mahathir said party leaders should be prepared to let go of their posts when the time came.

"Even though we may lose a lot, we must sacrifice. Otherwise, the party will get older as we will lose members.

"This (reminder) goes to all levels in the party, regardless of whether they are supreme council (members), assemblymen, members of parliament, ministers, division

heads or branch chiefs."

On the amendment to the party's constitution, which allowed for more representation to vote for leaders, Dr Mahathir said numbers alone were insufficient.

"Their attitude must be towards defending the party. The party is transformed if leaders love the party and are willing to step down."

He said the old Umno was strong as "members fought for the party, race and religion, and their priority was the party and not individuals."

To senior Umno members, he said they should accept new members.

"The seniors think they deserve more rewards for their loyalty and are afraid that new members will take over their positions."

He said Malays may lose power in 10 years as they were divided into three parties: Umno, Pas and Parti Keadilan Rakyat.

He called on party leaders to persuade Malays who had abandoned the party in the 2008 general election to re-join Umno.

Dr Mahathir said Umno and Barisan Nasional needed the support of non-Malays, especially the Chinese. "I was known as an ultra-Malay when I was appointed deputy prime minister in 1976. The Chinese were sceptical of me. Yet, in the 1999 general election, they gave me the most support.

"This is because we were fair to them. Yes, we helped Malays, but we also helped the Chinese.

"The ones who developed Kuala Lumpur and built skyscrapers were the Chinese, not Malays. The Chinese get their rights and so do Malays."



Former prime minister **Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad** hopes ongoing transformation in **Umno** can help strengthen the party and encourage unity. Pic by Hasriyasyah Sabudin