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'Go now and explain to the people'

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PLACING PARTY ABOVE SELF: Umno leaders have no choice but to go down to the ground to engage the people, and they must be ready to relinquish their posts when the time comes. Former Umno president Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad tells Sajahan Abdul Waheed, Lavanya Lingan and Rahmat Khairulrijal about his concerns as party leaders and members finalise preparations for the general election

Question: This year's Umno general assembly is very important as it is the last gathering before the general election. Your views, Tun?

Answer: This general assembly is the time for Umno leaders to strengthen party unity and return to the roots of the party's formation.

Many have forgotten about Umno's initial struggles and have used the party as a tool to get something for themselves. If party members return to the original path, I am confident that this general assembly will contribute much to Barisan Nasional's victory in the coming general election.

Question: What is the role party leaders should play in ensuring that Barisan Nasional (BN) wins big this time around?

Answer: I am not sure because I am not the leader any more. But a leader should realise weaknesses in the party and focus on recovering Umno in order to unite and work together for the upcoming general election as a team and not as individuals.

Question: To what extent have Umno leaders gone down to the ground to engage the people?

Answer: Datuk Seri Najib (Razak) seems to be proactive but we don't see many leaders as active (as he is).

They may be working together with Najib, but we do not see them giving talks in places. All these are supposed to take place before the general election.

Question: So, what should Umno leaders do to attract the voters?

Answer: Simple, they must know that it is their duty to go down and meet the people. They must not wait until they are named as candidates before doing that. They must go now and explain issues to the people.

But there are some who are afraid they cannot answer people's questions or criticisms and opt to keep quiet. And they claim that this is elegant silence. This is not elegant silence, it is pure stupidity.

Who becomes the candidate is actually not important but winning the elections for the party is important. Of course, to win the elections, the candidate must win. The choice is between winning and losing, not between the candidates. It is about setting up the government.

Question: However, some party leaders are overly concerned about not being named as can-



Question: Some veteran leaders are still keen on contesting the general election. How do you see this? Is it not time for them to make way for others?

Answer: I feel sad as many leaders do not adhere to this. I let go off my

posts to show that when the time comes, we must go. One should voluntarily step down and give way to new faces.

I stepped down not because anyone forced me to do so. I stepped down because I had been there for 21 years. So, it was time for someone else to hold the positions.

But there are some who want to remain there forever. One cannot decide to stay on by himself or herself. If the party wants to retain

him or her, that is all right.

But there are some who are adamant, and their supporters say they will sabotage the other candidate and ensure that he will lose if their leader is not re-nominated.

Is this the attitude of *orang parti* (party members)? What kind of struggle is this? It is for Mat or Saad and not for Umno? This is not Umno's struggle.

Question: Pas conducted prayers for the destruction of Umno and BN during its recent muktamar. Does this show that Pas has lost its direction as an Islamic party?

Answer: It is evident that the party is not holding on to the Islamic teachings and principles.

If we look at its history, the party was not formed for the religion. Umno has been fighting for a religious cause and the fight has been fruitful because it is the ruling party.

Pas left us because they were not chosen as elected representatives. Now, they talk about holding the prime ministership.

So, when the objective departs from the root, which is to struggle for Islam, thus Islam is sidelined.

They talk about implementing hudud. I want to ask, is it fair for a Muslim who is caught for theft to have his hands cut off while a non-Muslim is sent to prison for two months?

If they say it is fair, then I think the person is not in his right mind. Even in the Quran it is mentioned that punishments must be fair and just.

"We have to get closer to the younger generation. I was told that the young professionals are not supportive of BN but when I meet them, I find them to be rational."

Question: What say you, Tun?

Answer: Well, the result will be they will lose the elections. If they think about candidacy, they will lose the elections but if they think about the party, they will win.

Some may think that they are the best choice as candidates but others may not think so. That is why I emphasise supporting any chosen candidate. We assume that they are the party's candidate who have to win.

There is no candidate so good that no one else cannot take his or her place.

Question: How far, do you think, the Umno leadership should go in making unpopular decisions when it comes to choosing candidates?

Answer: We have to hold on to our

principles. If the leaders feel a candidate is good although he is not liked by others, we have to accept

that person. If we can accept (Datuk Seri) Idris Jala as a minister, if we can accept those outside the party to hold important posts in the government, then why can't we accept non-Umno candidates?

Actually, Umno's victory is not only because of the support of party members but also others who support our candidates.

If there is no support from non-Umno people, the party will not succeed. We do not have enough Umno supporters to win any constituency.

If you do research, you will find that Umno members are a minority if compared with the total number of voters.

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