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Privatise MAS and airlines will soar again, says Mahathir

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KUALA LUMPUR: Privatisation could be the answer to Malaysia Airlines' (MAS) "profitability problem" after several unsuccessful efforts to turn the airlines around, said Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The former prime minister said privatising MAS would force the management to become more focused in finding ways to make the national carrier profitable.

On the other hand, the perception could be that it was all right not to make money or to even record losses if the airline remained a government-linked company.

"There are people who think that GLCs are meant to provide employment opportuni-

ties and not to make money for the company or the Government.

"Privatising MAS may change this (mind-set) and the airline can probably make money, instead of losses," he said.

Dr Mahathir said his experience with Proton was a good example whereby the management of the national car manufacturer became more conscious of profits and losses after the company was privatised.

The former prime minister said there would not be any need to sell MAS to foreigners if a decision was made to privatise the airline because there were sufficient local talents to manage the company.

Talk about the sale of MAS had resurfaced with several parties believed to have sent in proposals to the Government to buy over the loss-making airlines.

However, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Idris Jala clarified that the Government had no plans to sell MAS at the moment and that it was implementing recommendations to rationalise the Government's role in business under the New Economic Model.

On Umno, Dr Mahathir said the party needed to attract young people or risk being "an old party and a party for the old".

He pointed out that while PAS had man-

aged to lure young doctors, lawyers and engineers, Umno, on the other hand, had not been successful because many felt there was no place for them in the party.

Dr Mahathir also said that some party leaders were "afraid to rope in young professionals because they do not want to be outsmarted".

"This is something which Umno needs to seriously look into to ensure its survival," he said.

"Sabotaging the party (during the general election) is also something which must be stopped as this has damaged Umno," said Dr Mahathir.