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# Invitation letter going out to Dr M

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## Zahid hopes former PM will attend Umno event

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**PETALING JAYA:** Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has been invited to attend the Dec 10 opening of the Umno general assembly despite his on-going attacks against Umno and the party president.

Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said that the party still respected him as a former president and former prime minister and that he hoped the elder man would be able to attend the event.

"I am very sure that the letter of invitation will go out soon but whether he accepts or not is for him to decide.

"The majority of Umno members still appreciate him but there is a line between respecting him and accepting his opinion, they are two different things," said the Deputy Prime Minister in an interview with *The Star* ahead of the Umno general assembly.

Dr Mahathir has been on the war-path against Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak for more than a year now and had demanded the Prime Minister's resignation over the 1MDB issue.

Dr Ahmad Zahid, himself a victim of Dr Mahathir's politics back in the 1990s, attributed the former premier's attacks and criticism to his "strong personality".

He said he made a courtesy visit to Dr Mahathir three months ago, shortly after he replaced Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin as the deputy prime minister.

"I called on Dr Mahathir at his residence. I had called on him twice before that on other matters but this was a courtesy call to show my respect and to seek guidance as well as advice. He was very frank and I want to respect the difference in opinion. I think he appreciated my visit," he said.

This will be Dr Ahmad Zahid's first time on the Umno stage as the deputy prime minister.

He said that his relationship with Muhyiddin was cordial and he did not expect it to be any different during the party assembly.

In a departure from convention, Muhyiddin will not be addressing the joint-opening of the three Umno wings on Dec 8.

The leaders of the Wanita, Pemuda and Puteri wings will open their own respective wings.

Asked whether Muhyiddin will deliver his usual winding-up speech as deputy president, Dr Ahmad

Zahid said it was for the supreme council to decide.

Dr Ahmad Zahid, who is also Home Minister, has been going around the country to meet state Umno leaders and party grassroots.

He has covered every state except for Sabah and Johor.

"The welcome has been very warm. In Perlis, more than 1,000 members turned up. In Selangor, they arranged seating for 1,500 members but so many came that they had to stand around the hall. It is not only to welcome me, it is a sign that they support the party and the leadership," he said.

He admitted that when he met the Kedah Umno leaders, Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Mukhriz Mahathir was a "little critical" in his speech.

"He has every right to say it as the state Umno liaison chairman. That is his style of speaking and I took it positively," he added.

He said that despite a dramatic year for the Umno leadership, he expected decorum at the general assembly because delegates, especially those who would be taking part in the debate know where to draw the line.

The Umno general assembly will start with the president's briefing and assemblies of the Wanita, Youth and Puteri wings on Dec 8 and 9.

The main assembly will be from Dec 10 to 12 where Najib will deliver his presidential address on the first day.



**Up close:** Dr Ahmad Zahid speaking candidly about the lead up to the Umno general assembly.