

Hisham rebuts Dr M, says Umno has improved
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KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 20 — Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein dismissed today Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's claim that Umno has not improved since Election 2008 and was unable to garner Malay support.

The former Umno president had said in an interview with Utusan Malaysia that Umno was a pale shadow of its former glory, and that it currently lacked good, credible leaders.

But Umno vice president Hishammuddin told reporters "this is not something unique to Umno. I do not deny that this will hamper our process... but we are going through a revision and transformation."

He said that it was not unusual for Dr Mahathir to throw out challenges and ideas for the party ahead of a general assembly, and that party members would need to rise to the occasion.

Hishammuddin said that today's special presidential briefing by Umno president Datuk Seri Najib Razak showed that the party was getting ready for the upcoming general election.

"This will answer a part of Tun's concerns," the home minister added.

Dr Mahathir was quoted by Umno-owned newspaper Utusan Malaysia today as saying "Umno became badly damaged when Tun Abdullah Badawi took over."

"Because he prioritised his family and there were so many corruption allegations. And everyone knew about his son-in-law's involvement," he said, referring to Umno Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin.

"This damaged Umno has been inherited by Datuk Seri Najib Razak for him to fix. Umno needs time before it can become stronger.

"But he (Najib) is busy and does not have enough time," he said.

In one of his harshest remarks against his party, Dr Mahathir said the issue of credible leaders affected Umno's divisional level as well as the central leadership.

He said that some Umno leaders were only interested in holding on to a particular post within the party, or wanted to contest in the next general election and did not care about strengthening the party.

The former prime minister remained sceptical about Umno's upcoming assembly, saying that he doubted party leaders would actually use it as a platform to resolve outstanding issues.

Umno goes into what is likely to be its last general assembly before a general election expected early next year.

Prime Minister Najib is said to need a marked improvement from the last polls to retain his position and only a return of Barisan Nasional's customary two-thirds majority of Parliament can guarantee he remains in office.

BN ceded 82 federal seats and five state governments to the opposition in the landmark March 2008 election.

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