

THE STAR

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Dr M has right to speak out on Umno, says Rais

KUALA LUMPUR: Jelevu Umno division chief Datuk Seri Dr Rais Yatim lashed out at those who criticised former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad for making statements regarding Umno.

"There are many who are blasting Tun Dr Mahathir for making statements about Umno. This should not be an issue," said Rais, who is Foreign Minister.

"He has the *locus standi* (standing) to make any statement on Umno. He led the party for 23 years.

"If they want to say something to him, look at him straight in the eye and tell him. Dr Mahathir has every right to say what he wants about Umno," he told reporters when met at the Foreign Ministry's Friends of Malaysia cultural exchange programme here yesterday.

Over the last month there had been calls by certain Umno leaders, including Umno president and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, blaming Dr Mahathir for a divided Umno.

The former prime minister earlier this year quit the party, which

he once led, saying that he would only return once Abdullah vacates the party and government posts.

On another note, Rais alleged that there is a rapid rise in the menace of money politics in Umno and if left unchecked, the scourge would spell the death of the largest political party in the country.

The Anti-Corruption Commission Act, which had been proposed and is to be tabled in the Dewan Rakyat by year end, would be able to cover this practice, which had bedevilled Umno every time it held its elections, he said.

Umno, the backbone of the ruling Barisan Nasional, will hold its elections in March next year.

Under the party's system, all 191 divisions will nominate leaders to contest for the top national positions, from the president, deputy president, three vice-presidents down to the 25 supreme council members.

Rais had announced his wish to contest the vice-presidency and to date has obtained only six nominations. — Bernama