

A TRIBUTE TO A DEDICATED LEADER

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P UMNO president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday that it was unusual for any leader to give up his post voluntarily.

"Usually leaders try to establish a dynasty while in power and only let go through force or threats," he said.

The Deputy Prime Minister said the fact that Datuk Hussein Onn stepped down voluntarily showed the Prime Minister's dedication, sincerity, statesmanship, integrity and firmness.

"Even if a leader does step down because he is forced to, he usually foists his own candidate, probably from his own family, on the people.

"This causes ill-feelings. Datuk Hussein, however, left it to the party to decide who it wants as its leader and to elect the leader through democracy," he said.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir was winding up the debates on the last day of the Umno general assembly. It was his first speech to the party as its new president.

The more than 1,000 delegates who filled the hall were moved to tears by the emotion of the moment.

Datuk Hussein himself and other members of the party's Supreme Council were seen wiping away tears while Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir, who struggled to keep himself under control, spoke.

The Deputy Premier, who will take over as Prime Minister from Datuk Hussein on July 16, said that unlike other countries where leaders try to stay in power for as long as they can, two leaders, have voluntarily stepped down in Malaysia.

"The first was Tunku Abdul Rahman and now it is Datuk Hussein. Both of them also did not force us to accept their choice of new leaders.

"There were those who tried to influence the Tunku to pick them to succeed him but he, fully aware that the late Tun Abdul Razak was widely accepted, just pointed out Tun Razak to us and we chose Tun Razak.

"Datuk Hussein could easily have put aside the Umno delegates if he had stepped down last year or next year," he said.

He said that if Datuk Hussein had stepped down last year, he could have picked the leaders he wanted and Umno would al-

most surely endorse these leaders, at the party election this year.

"If Datuk Hussein wanted, he could have stepped down next year and appoint his successor. It would be fait accompli and Umno would have to accept the new leader.

"But Datuk Hussein instead gave Umno the opportunity to choose its own leaders in a sincere and democratic spirit," he said.

He added that this was also a chance for himself to test whether Umno wanted him to be the new leader.

"He gave the party a chance to hold contests and for the party to have a choice of its own," he said.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said he was aware that there were some people who thought that to have avoided an unhealthy campaign, Datuk Hussein should have handpicked the leaders he wanted to succeed him.

"Our concept has always been that it is Umno that controls the Government and not the other way round. If the Prime Minister can choose who he wants as deputy president, then it would mean that it is the Prime Minis-

ter who controls the party (and not the party president).

"Some people believe that if the Prime Minister choose the leaders he wants, the party would definitely endorse his choice.

"But what about the feelings of those who are not picked and their supporters.

"If the Prime Minister picks his leaders, I think Umno would endorse the choice but there will be problems. Umno members will feel that the party has been pushed into second place," he said.

He said he supported Datuk Hussein's decision to allow the party to choose its leaders but stressed that once the party has made its decision, it must close ranks.

He added that in his 36 years in Umno he always had someone above him to advice him and protect him.

"But now I have to bear the heavy responsibilities and duties by myself. I cannot hide behind Datuk Hussein anymore. I will also have to shoulder the burdens of others," he said.