

# 'I did my best to make him stay on'

PENANG, Sat. — Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today he tried his best to persuade Datuk Hussein Onn to stay on as Prime Minister and Umno President.

"However, Datuk Hussein said he was firm in his decision to step down," he added when opening the State Umno Convention at a hotel here.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said Datuk Hussein wanted to step down "quite long ago" but he made clear his decision to him (Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir) about a month later when he appealed to Datuk Hussein to stay on.

"I asked him to stay on then but he said that because of health reasons, he could not give his full attention to running the party and carrying out his duties as Prime Minister," he said.

"I told Datuk Hussein that his leadership was still needed and I volunteered to do the routine jobs of the Prime Minister while

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he handled policy matters."

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said Datuk Hussein said he was firm in his decision to step down and "he told me that he could not take a salary without doing his job."

The Deputy Prime Minister said perhaps Umno members all over the country could try to get Datuk Hussein to change his mind.

"I think Umno has yet to appeal to him as we do not know how Datuk Hussein will react if all Umno members appeal to him to stay on," he added.

He said Datuk Hussein Onn's decision to step down was a very sad one. He would be missed very much by all the National Front parties.

He said under Datuk Hussein's leadership, the National Front had done very well in the 1978 general election "and I personally want him to stay on to lead us in the next general election."

Datuk Seri Dr

Mahathir said that except for the 1955 general election in which the Alliance won 51 out of the 52 seats it contested, the party in power did not do as well in the other general election until the 1978 general election and this was because of Datuk Hussein's leadership.

"Today, all our races have improved their standard of living and have enjoyed the taste of living in a rich country. We all hope Datuk Hussein will change his mind and accept our appeals to stay on," he said.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir also said that the Umno Supreme Council, after studying the party constitution, decided that the various State Umno committees should hold conventions every year.

He said this would help because at present, all the problems affecting Malays in their respective States were brought up for discussion at the Umno General Assembly.