

'My deputy is a selfless leader and loyal to Umno'

MAHATHIR BACKS GHAFAR

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JITRA, Sat. — The Prime Minister said here today that he appointed Ghafar Baba as his deputy because of the latter's loyalty to Umno.

Describing him as "a selfless leader," Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Encik Ghafar had at all times served the party loyally, irrespective of whether he was in the Government or not.

"Encik Ghafar has always remained of service to the party and the Barisan Nasional," he said when opening the Kubang Pasu division delegates' conference here.

Dr Mahathir, who is also the Umno president, said Encik Ghafar's qualities were in contrast with those of some leaders who were prepared to wreck the party to achieve their objectives.

"This sort of people will destroy the party if they are chosen as leaders," he added.

He said Encik Ghafar was not vengeful towards former Prime Minister Tun Hussein Onn when the latter by-passed him for the post of Deputy Prime Minister.

"In fact, he was not jealous of me when I was appointed in his place."

Dr Mahathir also said he picked Encik Ghafar because of his experience as a Cabinet Minister as well as an Umno leader.

Encik Ghafar was Malacca Chief Minister and a Federal Minister before he quit the Cabinet. He is also the longest-serving Umno vice-president, having held the post for 25 years.

Dr Mahathir said when Encik Ghafar left the Cabinet, he contested the Umno vice-presidency on the strength of his name and the members accepted him.

He added that when Encik Ghafar left the Cabinet he did so honourably and without discrediting any leader.

He also did not attempt to cause any trouble to the top leadership or the party.

Dr Mahathir also explained that he was bringing the matter up for the first time because certain quarters were slandering him and making baseless accusations against him in the run-up to the Umno elections.

He further said that when Encik Ghafar was offered the post of Deputy Prime Minister, he accepted without any condition.