

Mahathir:

Why I

picked

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Ghafar to

be deputy

ALOR STAR, Sat. — Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad said today he appointed Encik Ghafar Baba as his deputy because of the latter's loyalty to Umno and his commitment to serve the people and country.

The Prime Minister and Umno president said he was bringing this up for the first time because certain quarters were slandering and discrediting him (Ghafar) and hurling baseless accusations against him in the run-up to the Umno elections.

"Encik Ghafar is, in fact, chosen by collective decision in line with the aspirations of Umno members," he said when opening the Kubang Pasu division meeting today.

He said Encik Ghafar had the best track record in Umno having served as a vice-president for 25 years.

"No party president, deputy president or vice presidents had ever held their positions for that long."

He said this alone was enough to qualify him for any top position in the Government.

Dr Mahathir said Encik Ghafar continued to serve the party and people faithfully even when he (Ghafar) was not appointed Deputy Prime Minister by Datuk Hussein Onn.

"Encik Ghafar left the Cabinet to concentrate on his business but he never once criticised or attacked Datuk Hussein or me in any way."

"He never tried to topple Datuk Hussein in revenge but remained a party member, working hard to strengthen Umno and helped extensively in the general elections," he added.

Dr Mahathir said men in such circumstances could be expected to resort to various actions to vent their frustrations but Encik Ghafar "never even tried to react adversely because he loved Umno too much to hurt it."

"Until after I took over from Datuk Hussein as Prime Minister, Ghafar continued his party work and right now, he is still working hard for Umno and the people," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that Encik Ghafar, despite his age (he is 63), had never failed to answer the call of duty when he was time and again re-elected vice-president.

"When I called upon him to serve as Deputy Prime Minister, he did not refuse or pose any conditions but accepted the responsibility."

"This is the type of man we need. A man who must be given a rightful place in Umno, one who truly has the Umno spirit.

"He was one of those few who never felt he need serve no more just because he was out of the Government," he said.