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MAHATHIR-SUCCESSOR
(EMBARGO: FOR USE AFTER 6 P.M. TODAY, DEC 28)

KUALA LUMPUR, DEC 28 (BERNAMA) -- DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR MOHAMAD TODAY URGED UMNO MEMBERS TO STRICTLY ADHERE TO THE PARTY'S TRADITION IN CHOOSING HIS SUCCESSOR IN FUTURE ELECTIONS TO ENSURE UNITY IN THE PARTY.

SAYING THAT AFTER HIM, IT SHOULD BE ENCIK GHAFAR BABA THAT WOULD TAKE OVER THE LEADERSHIP OF THE PARTY AND THE GOVERNMENT, THE PRIME MINISTER SAID THAT ENCIK GHAFAR'S SUCCESSOR WOULD BE LEFT ENTIRELY TO THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER HIMSELF.

HE HOWEVER STRESSED THAT AS FAR AS HE WAS CONCERNED, HE WOULD LIKE TO LET UMNO DECIDE.

+ AS YOU KNOW WHEN I ASSUMED THE PRIME MINISTERSHIP (IN 1981) I DID NOT APPOINT MY DEPUTY. I WAITED UNTIL THE UMNO ASSEMBLY WAS HELD IN ORDER TO CHOOSE THE DEPUTY PRESIDENT OF UMNO,+ HE SAID IN A YEAR-END INTERVIEW WITH SENIOR EDITORS AT HIS OFFICE HERE.

+AND THAT DEPUTY PRESIDENT (DATUK MUSA HITAM) BECAME THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER. I WOULD LIKE TO GO ALONG WITH THAT. I WOULD NOT LIKE TO IMPOSE MY WISHES ON THE PARTY AND THE NATION,+ HE SAID.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR, WHO IS THE UMNO PRESIDENT, SAID THE ATTEMPT TO CHANGE THE LEADERSHIP IN 1987 WAS THE MOST DESTRUCTIVE, ADDING THAT HE HAD SAID THAT EVEN BEFORE THE CONTEST (BETWEEN TENGKU RAZALEIGH HAMZAH AND HIM) TOOK PLACE BECAUSE IT WAS A DEPARTURE FROM UMNO TRADITION. -- MORE

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+ I HAVE ALWAYS BELIEVED THAT YOU SHOULD STICK TO TRADITION, THAT YOU DON'T CHALLENGE AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL, BECAUSE OBVIOUSLY WHEN YOU CHALLENGE, IT MEANS THE PARTY MUST SPLIT,+ HE SAID.

+ AS A CONSEQUENCE OF THAT CHALLENGE, THE SUPPORTERS OF THE CANDIDATE WHO LOSES CANNOT BE RECONCILED WITH THAT OF THE CANDIDATE WHO WINS.

+ IF I HAD LOST IN THE ELECTION, I'M QUITE SURE THE PARTY WOULD FACE THE SAME TROUBLE, EXCEPT OF COURSE, I DON'T THINK THEY WOULD GO THE COURT, BUT THERE WOULD BE NO UNITY IN THE PARTY,+ HE SAID.

HE SAID THE ATTEMPT TO CHANGE THE PARTY'S LEADERSHIP IN 1987 WAS THE MOST DESTRUCTIVE EVENT IN THE PARTY'S HISTORY AS IT WAS A DEVIATION FROM PARTY PRACTICE.

WHILE IT WAS FINE TO TALK ABOUT DEMOCRACY, DEMOCRACY HAD GOT TO BE PRACTISED ALSO IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE TRADITION OF DEMOCRACY, HE SAID.

SAYING THAT PURE DEMOCRACY +DOESN'T WORK+, HE SAID: +MERELY BECAUSE YOU CAN CONTEST, THEREFORE YOU CONTEST... IT WILL NOT WORK.+

HE SAID IF THERE HAD BEEN 100 OR 200 CONTESTANTS WITH THEIR OWN SUBSTANTIAL SUPPORTERS, THE PARTY WOULD BE SPLIT INTO 100 OR MORE SMALL DIFFERENT PARTIES.

IT WOULD BE DEMOCRATIC BUT WOULD IT BRING ABOUT GOOD RESULTS, HE ASKED.

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DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID A TWO-PARTY SYSTEM WAS AS DEMOCRATIC AS A MULTI-PARTY SYSTEM OR EVEN A SINGLE PARTY SYSTEM WHERE DEMOCRACY WAS PRACTISED WITHIN THE PARTY.

+ SO DEMOCRACY IS SOMETIMES INTERPRETED BY EVERYONE AS MEANING MERE ADHERENCE TO THE DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES WITHOUT ANY REGARD FOR TRADITION,+ HE SAID.

HE INSISTED THAT TRADITION WAS IMPORTANT, SAYING +THAT IS WHY I KEEP ON SAYING THAT THERE SHOULD BE NO CONTEST.+

HE SAID AFTER DATUK MUSA WON THE UMNO DEPUTY PRESIDENT POST IN 1981, IN 1984 HE HAD OPENLY SAID THAT THERE SHOULD BE NO CONTEST AGAINST DATUK MUSA BECAUSE IT WOULD ONLY RESULT IN A SPLIT.

THE UMNO TRADITION IS THAT MEMBERS ELECT THE PERSON AT THE SECOND LEVEL, AND HAVING ELECTED HIM, THEY DO NOT QUESTION HIM ANY MORE.

+WHEN HE TAKES OVER, HE WILL HAVE THE WHOLE FOLLOWING, NOT A SPLIT FOLLOWING,+ HE SAID. -- BERNAMA

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