

CNS8721

R PE 23-11 00203 EA278

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Ghafar-position

GHAFAR WANTS MAHATHIR TO CONTINUE

(EMBARGO: For release at 10.38 pm today)

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KUALALUMPUR, Nov 23 (Bernama) -- Deputy Prime Minister Ghafar Baba said tonight he hoped hatuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad would continue to head Umno and lead the nation for as long as possible.

+I pray for his good health and long life so that he may continue his good work. For so long as he wishes to continue his work, I will support him, regardless of my position,+ said Ghafar who is also Umno deputy president.

+I'd like Dr Mahathir to hold his post for as long as he wants,+ he said in an interview on RTM's Wawancara programme.

Ghafar said age should not be a factor because, in politics, experience was what counted.

He was commenting on speculation that it was the age factor -- his and Dr Mahathir's -- that had led to the jockeying for positions in Umno at present. Both he and Dr Mahathir would turn 68 by the time Umno elections take place next year and past 70 when the subsequent party polls are held.  
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▼23/11/16-18MST

CNS8724

R P E 23-11 00184 EA279

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Ghafar-position 2 Kuala Lumpur (Embargo)

Ghafar said the question of age should not arise at all, as there was no law stating that one must cease being active in politics upon attaining a certain age.

+Politics requires experience so that mistakes of the past are not repeated. One, mistake we make,, the nation loses,+ he said.

As for himself, Ghafar said he would continue to hold his posts in the party and government for as long as his services were required.

He said he would be more than happy to give up his positions when he was no longer needed by the Prime Minister or the party.

Ghafar said he would however continue to support Dr Mahathir regardless of his own (Ghafar's) position.

He was asked whether there was any pressure on him to retire before the Umno party elections next year.

+I don't know what pressure is to be put, on me. For me, things are simple. Whatever the party decides, I'll follow,+ he said. -- more

▼23/11/16-21MST

CNS8726

R PE 23-11 00176 EA280

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Ghafar-position 3 Kuala Lumpur (Embargo)

To comments that 'there were still people questioning his position as a successor to Dr Mahathir although he had been Deputy Prime Minister for six Years now, Ghafar said his struggle had never been towards becoming prime Minister..

+If I aspired to become Prime Minister, why should I quit (the Cabinet) in 1976? It's not easy to return to the Cabinet when you've resigned as a minister, + he said.

Ghafar said he decided 'to rejoin the government when Dr Mahathir asked him for his help after Datuk Musa Hitam suddenly resigned as Deputy Prime Minister.

He said he supported Dr Mahathir's statement that whoever took over the leadership in future must continue the struggle to make Malaysia a developed nation by the year 2020 or even earlier.

He said if the leader concerned failed to carry out his responsibility, he would be forced out through the ordinary political process of party polls and general election. -- more

▼23/11/16-23MST

CNS8728

R PE 23-11 00188 EA281

aae the

Ghafar-position 4 Kuala Lumpur (Embargo)

On the possibility that next year's Umno elections would lead to a split in the party as had happened in 1987, Ghafar said he did not **think** this would happen as the president's post would not be contested and Dr Mahathir would be returned with the full support of members.

He was also confident **that** the contest for other Posts, keen though it **may be**, would not break up the party.

Ghafar however refused to **say** whether he felt that the status quo involving the president and deputy president should be maintained.

+If I say yes, then it would appear that I do not want my Post to be challenged, + he said.

+I respect the party constitution and the wishes of the members. If they want to change their leaders, including me, it is up to them, + he said.

On the emergence of cliques in Umno whenever party elections drew near, Ghafar said it was the duty of both party leaders and members to stop this.

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▼23/11/16-24MST

CNS8734

R PE 23-11 00189 BA 282

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Ghafar-position 5 Kuala Lumpur (Embargo)

They should instead devote their energies towards the economic improvement of the lot of the Malays.

Ghafar said he did not want to be associated with any group or clique.

+This has been my stand from before. I joined Umno with no intention of holding any post, be it in the party or government. I just wanted to do my bit as a citizen,+ he, said.

Ghafar expressed confidence that the issue of poison-pen letters would not influence Umno members as they had become more mature. The, subject had attracted the attention of many delegates at the Umno General Assembly early this month.

He urged Umno members to elect leaders who they thought could run the party and country well and advised the authors of these letters to cease their action which, was a waste of time and money.

Ghafar was also asked on the possibility of money politics rearing its head in Umno again as there were now many rich entrepreneurs and businessmen in the party. -- more

▼23/11/16-26MST

CNS8735

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aae tbe

Ghafar-position 6 (last) Kuala Lumpur

He said it was Umno's wish to see the emergence of many successful Malay businessmen and entrepreneurs but this should not lead to money politics.

On efforts to create a Bumiputera Commercial and Industrial Community (BCIC), Ghafar said the government was not yet satisfied with the present achievement as individual ownership was small and most of the equity was held by the government.

He said efforts towards this end would continue +because We do' not want to see one race so progressive in Malaysia and another so backward.+ --  
Bernama

▼23/11/16-27MST