

Dr M: I want to hand over an Umno that is intact,

Ensuring orderly

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By Ahmad A Talib

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, in a sober tone reflecting the seriousness of the issue, said he wants to hand over to his successor an Umno that is intact, strong, united and credible.

The Umno president and Prime Minister said he wanted to make sure that when the time came for a change in the party leadership, it would be done in an orderly manner and free from crisis.

Dr Mahathir, in his opening address at the Umno annual general assembly at the Putra World Trade Centre here, said: "Something that is unavoidable by a political party, whether democratic or not, is a change of leadership.

"Normally the process of change brings problems, sometimes to the extent of ruining the party. In the history of Umno, the change of leadership had occurred four times. *Alhamdulillah*, although there were splits following the change of leadership, it has not become a habit.

"I am grateful because at the time I took over the party leadership, there was no problem whatsoever. Now, I have led the party for more than 14 years and am 70 years old. Certainly the time will come, not long from now, for a new leader of the party.

"If allowed, let me mention my intention here, that the change that will happen will not bring any disaster to the party. My intention is to hand over to my successor a party which is strong, united and credible. And in the Umno tradition, the successor to the president is the deputy president."

Delegates, guests and observers to the assembly greeted Dr Mahathir's speech with all-round approval. A standing ovation at the end of his one hour-15-minute speech was testimony of that.

A warm handshake between him and his deputy, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim,

immediately after the speech, went down well with the delegates. Routine though the handshake might seem, the delegates felt that the show of camaraderie was proof of Umno's unity and continued progress.

Dr Mahathir said that efforts to create suspicion between the president and his deputy should not have been made, especially by party members. He added that such despicable acts done by foreigners or the enemies of Umno and the country was intended to weaken and disunite Umno.

He said they did so in the hope that when the change in leadership took place, the new president would get only half of Umno — that is, those who supported him.

Dr Mahathir said: "The outgoing president's supporters will be frustrated and quit the party. They may even oppose the party. And this will certainly weaken it.

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"Remember what happened in 1987. The losers went to court and as a result the party was declared illegal. And when they failed to form and lead the new Umno, they set up their own party, co-operating with the Opposition.

"*Alhamdulillah*, we succeeded in overcoming the 1987 problem. But the after-effects of the dispute did not benefit us.

"So then, allow me to propose that when the time comes for the change of leadership, there will not be any crisis. On the other hand, Umno will be handed over to the new president intact, safely and in an orderly manner.

strong, united and credible

succession