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Remain true to party's spirit, says Dr Mahathir

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MALACCA, Sat. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today reminded Umno leaders and members to remain true to the cause and struggles of the party.

The Umno president said the party must maintain its philosophy of upholding the interests of the people and not those of individuals.

The Prime Minister said this at a Press conference after a closed-door meeting at the Ayer Keroh Country Resort.

More than 80 Malacca Umno leaders from all six divisions, led by Chief Minister and the party's State liaison committee chief Datuk Seri Isnin, were present.

Abu Zahar then led Umno leaders in a pledge of loyalty and allegiance to the Prime Minister.

The Umno liaison committee also expressed its support for the call that the posts of party president and deputy president not be contested next year.

Asked what transpired at the meeting, Dr Mahathir said:

"I briefed the meeting about our economic situation, particularly about the reasons which led to the present difficulties.

"I called upon everyone to understand the problems and what had caused them. I also highlighted the loss of the Barisan Nasional in the Arau by-election (on July 4) and reasons for the defeat."

He said Umno leaders in the State were very interested to know about the economic problems and the measures taken to overcome them.

At the meeting, Dr Mahathir stressed the need for Umno and BN leaders and members to close ranks and work together to help the Government overcome the economic problems.

Asked whether he had conveyed any special message at the meeting, Dr Mahathir said:

"I want them to fully understand the struggle and the spirit of Umno.

"Umno is for the people and not for individual interests."

Asked what were the reasons for BN's defeat in Arau, he said there were many.

"They included the lack of dedication among those in Umno as against those from the Opposition who had been active and had shown high spirit in their struggles.

"Umno seemed to have lacked the spirit."

Asked how could there be a lack of dedication among members when Umno had just held its general assembly, he replied: "Arau was considered an Umno stronghold and we were bound to win.

"The worst that could happen, we thought was, victory with a reduced majority and hence there was no need for us to put in too much work ... we could win automatically. This is very dangerous thinking."

He said the defeat in Arau would also give a lot of lessons to Umno members and supporters.

It should make Umno members and supporters realise how important it was for them to work with greater zeal.

Asked whether the increase in taxes on jungle fruits and the choice of the Menteri Besar's younger brother as a candidate were factors contributing to the defeat, Dr Mahathir said: "We cannot say that a particular result is due to one factor only.

"There are many reasons. I think the tax on the fruits was one of the causes and this was exploited by the Opposition.

"The same with the choice of the candidate which was turned into an issue by the Opposition. This had some effect and they all added up," Dr Mahathir said.

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