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Dr M: Razaleigh to sit in at Umno supreme council meetings

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Kelantan Umno liaison chief Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah will now attend the party's supreme council meetings, another sign of the greater role expected of him in efforts to re-capture the state from Pas in the coming general election.

Party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said after the council's meeting at Umno headquarters here tonight that Tengku Razaleigh will now sit in at the council's meetings.

The Prime Minister said the decision was made not only by virtue of his State Umno position but also because he needed to know deliberations of the council.

"He has played a big role in Kelantan and I believe, in the general election, he will contribute in the campaign. So, he needs to know the deliberations of the council...perhaps he could contribute ideas."

Tengku Razaleigh, the Gua Musang MP and former president of the now-defunct Parti Melayu Semangat 46, was named Kelantan Umno chief by Dr Mahathir on June 20. He succeeded Dr Mahathir who had held the post since 1990.

He will now join Pahang Menteri Besar Datuk Adnan Yaakob and Malacca Chief Minister Datuk Seri Abu Zahar Isnin to "sit in" at the meetings.

Asked whether Tengku Razaleigh has been effective as the state party chief, Dr Mahathir said: "It has been effective as he has been able to rally support for Umno in Kelantan. The response has been good."

Even Kelantan Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Aziz Nik Mat had attested to Tengku Razaleigh's effectiveness, Dr Mahathir quipped.

If not, he said, Nik Aziz would not have asked Tengku Razaleigh to be his (Nik Aziz's) "envoy" to the Federal Government to write off the state's debts.

Dr Mahathir also said that he would continue with his state visits, indicating that the general election might not be as soon as speculated by some.

"I'll be in the Federal Territory for two days and Selangor also for two days. When it is over, I may start another round, then perhaps another round and so on," he said tongue-in-cheek.

Asked on the feedback he gained from visits to the states so far, Dr Mahathir said the response were very good, adding he appreciated the support of the people.

For example, he said during his visit to Jengka, Pahang, a large number of people had turned up that five giant tents set up for the event were not enough to accommodate the crowd.

Dr Mahathir said some of them even brought their kids and promised to get them to join Umno even though they were barely six months old.

"They received me warmly and seemed eager to greet me."

On whether this indicated solid support for the Government, Dr Mahathir said it seemed to be the case unless the people were hypocrites.

"But I do not think they are...they looked sincere."

On whether the good response would influence him in deciding on when to call the general election, Dr Mahathir replied: "Maybe...maybe."

To a claim by Pas that it had settled its accumulated debts to the Federal Government, Dr Mahathir said the party was free to say anything they like.

The council also discussed the party's election machinery preparations

and the Barisan Nasional 25th anniversary celebrations. States have also been directed to scrutinise the electoral rolls.

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