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Umno-Surprise

NO SURPRISE TURNS OUT TO BE A SURPRISE AFTER ALL

By: E Sivabalan

KUALA LUMPUR, June 20 (Bernama) -- Surprise or no surprise, the 53rd Umno general assembly ended today with some shocking revelations after all.

Everyone was kept guessing after the Prime Minister and Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad promised a "surprise" announcement in his presidential address on Friday.

At a news conference that followed later that day, Dr Mahathir appeared to have put to rest the guessing game when he said that "no surprise is the surprise".

Even so, many thought there were indeed "several other surprises" in the presidential address although not quite the surprise they had expected.

For them, the prime minister's revelation about the events leading to the sacking of his deputy Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim last September was the so-called surprise.

Dr Mahathir had said there was no conspiracy on his part to oust Anwar but rather, Anwar had conspired against the prime minister himself.

Dr Mahathir spoke at length about how;

- \* he almost became the victim of Anwar's political conspiracy;
- \* Anwar had tried to cover up his alleged sexual misconduct; and
- \* Anwar used foreigners and the foreign media to further his own

political agenda.

Anwar was sacked from the Cabinet on Sept 2 and from Umno a day after.

While this could be the surprise for some, to others the surprise was the release of a list yesterday of billions of ringgit worth of government projects awarded to Anwar's supporters.

Hundreds of people scanned a list titled "Projects awarded to the supporters of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim" displayed outside the main convention hall of the Putra World Trade Center where the assembly was held.

Then at yesterday's press conference came revelation when the prime minister said the government had names, including those of Anwar's family members, who were appointed to be company directors and chairmen.

Dr Mahathir also revealed at the same press conference about his suspicion that Anwar had wanted to do away with the post of Deputy Prime Minister after taking over from him.

The reason for his suspicion, according to Dr Mahathir, was that Anwar who was then the finance minister, did not approve the construction of the DPM's official residence in Putrajaya, the new federal administrative capital.

While many delegates expected Dr Mahathir to announce the dissolution of Parliament during the assembly, he chose to keep everyone, including the opposition, to continue guessing about it .

He did not even give any indication of a possible general election date but did tell a news conference that the Barisan Nasional was confident of retaining its two-thirds majority in Parliament.

Dr Mahathir also said that he was duty-bound to lead the country into the new millennium.

There were also other surprising elements and characteristics of this assembly.

Many party members had feared declining Umno membership in the light of the current economic and political situation.

For them there was a pleasant surprise.

The number of Umno members, on the contrary, had increased to 2,771,768 as of May 31 this year, according to party secretary-general Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob.

The assembly also saw PAS taking a severe beating from the 2,000 delegates, unlike in previous assemblies.

Taking the cue from the party president, they lambasted the opposition party in an unprecedented manner for using Islam against Umno and for engaging in unIslamic activities at the same time.

-- BERNAMA

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