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### Abdullah's pledge of support

UMNO deputy president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has vowed to give his fullest co-operation to Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to ensure the party's superiority and has urged members to do the same.

He said party leaders must, along with him, ensure that Dr Mahathir, as party president and Prime Minister, would not be alone in facing challenges within the party and the Government.

"On my part, I will make sure he is not alone in facing the enemy," he said in his maiden speech as the party's number two when winding up the debate on the final day of the Umno general assembly.

Thanking the delegates for choosing the party leadership, Abdullah hoped those elected would work hard to ensure that the ruling party continued to be strong and capable of developing the country.

He said the first test of their co-operation and dedication after this assembly would be the Teluk Kemang by-election scheduled for June 10.

The Deputy Prime Minister expressed confidence that Umno would be able to fulfil its responsibilities to develop the race, religion and nation if all members work hand in hand.

Abdullah, in a lighter vein, also spoke about his reaction to the election of Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib and Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin as party vice-presidents.

He said he was approached by reporters after the results were announced, telling him that the three were from the "Wawasan team".

"I told them 'So what?' The reporters said it was the same team which had caused me to lose (in the 1993 party elections).

"I said, surely I have not forgotten. In 1993, they followed another manager, but now I am the manager," he joked to a roar of laughter among the delegates.

Congratulating the three, Abdullah said: "I regard them as my friends".

He said it was normal in an election for one to be "edged out if he cannot withstand the heat".

The deputy president pledged to work with the new vice-presidents and would ensure that there was no discrimination in the party.

Abdullah expressed his support for Dr Mahathir's principle of not seeking popularity in striving for the betterment of the party and nation and promised to take a similar approach.

"There is no reason to fear in carrying out one's responsibility. We should only fear God," he said.

He said it was important for Umno to have a firm leadership so that it would remain supreme.

It would be pointless to be popular, he said, when one failed to achieve his noble objective.

"What is also important is the fact that the winner after the elections is Umno. The delegates' wise choice gives Umno victory because it ensures a credible leadership."

Abdullah, who won the number two post unopposed in the elections on Thursday, admitted that the responsibility was heavy but promised to carry it out as entrusted to him.

He urged members to make Umno's struggle an ibadah (religious obligation) and to refrain from despicable actions.

"If our intention is ibadah, we will certainly not resort to actions such as slander, breach of trust, irregularities and abuse of power."

Abdullah also reminded members to accept the results of the elections in a family spirit.

On the country's development, he said Malaysia might be a small country but it had outstanding achievements which might enable it to be the first country of the Organisation of Islamic Conference to attain developed status.

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