

13/09/2000

Party leaders back Dr M's move

Ainon Mohd; Sajahan Waheed

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's move to concentrate more on the party's affairs will strengthen Umno and help to effectively counter lies and accusations spread by the opposition.

Umno vice-president Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib said there was a pressing need for Dr Mahathir to spend more time on the ground and explain Umno's argument as Pas had been feeding the public with wrong information and lies about the party and the Government.

"There is nothing like the 'personal touch' in face-to-face meetings with the people. This will certainly boost the (grassroot) morale," he said.

Muhammad, who is also Selangor Umno liaison committee chairman, was asked to comment on the statement by Dr Mahathir after chairing the supreme council meeting yesterday that he would concentrate more on Umno affairs than on the Government.

Dr Mahathir also said tasks to handle government functions would be left to his deputy, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Muhammad said the fact that Dr Mahathir, as the Prime Minister, had decided to take some time off to concentrate on party matters was nothing new as before this other Umno leaders like the late Tun Abdul Razak also did the same.

"The emphasis is no longer on the development of the country as Dr Mahathir had successfully steered this country to where it is now. Efforts should be made to address problems within the party.

"By doing this, Dr Mahathir is taking the party back to the people and spending more time on the ground."

Umno supreme council member Azimi Daim said Dr Mahathir's move would help strengthen the party and encourage members to work harder for the party.

"This is necessary as we need to motivate Umno members to continue their hard work.

"It also shows Dr Mahathir's sincerity in uniting the party and in facing challenges especially from Pas," said Azimi, who is also Umno Youth exco member and the movement's information chief.

Azimi said during yesterday's meeting, Dr Mahathir also touched on the need to give more opportunities to the younger leaders to prove their ability.

"He said the younger leaders should be ready to play a more important role and requested the senior leaders to give way if necessary to the younger ones."

Another supreme council member, Dr Norraesah Mohamad, said by giving Abdullah more opportunities to handle government matters, Dr Mahathir was ensuring a smooth transition of power.

"This is a fine arrangement and the experience gained by Abdullah would help him," said Dr Norraesah, who is also an Umno Wanita exco member.

On Dr Mahathir paying more attention to party matters, she said this would help the party tackle internal hiccups and overcome the onslaught by Pas.

"I view this as a positive development both for the party and the Government. In the past Dr Mahathir has often been accused of not paying much attention to party members, at least he can now prove these allegations wrong."

Penang Wanita Umno chief Saripah Aminah Syed Mohamed said Dr Mahathir's move was aimed at ensuring that the party would become stronger. "This is important as when Abdullah takes over the leadership later, he will be inheriting a strong party."

(END)