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Top party leaders swear loyalty

Ahmad A. Talib

LOYALTY seemed to be the buzzword on the last day of the general assembly. Several top leaders made reference to it, expressing their faith in the party and the struggles it represents.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad also declared his loyalty to Umno, in his winding up speech. The party president and Prime Minister drew applause when he declared that Umno members should stay loyal to him "only if I do good".

The loyalty issue came up again as speaker after speaker from the supreme council addressed the gathering. But Dr Mahathir's remarks triggered an open display of emotion from the crowd.

This was his most open revelation about his loyalty in relation to Umno's present problems. He argued that loyalty to the party was important if it wanted to continue to be in power and meet its objectives.

Stressing that Umno's survival, and that of the Malays, depended on the loyalty of its members, Dr Mahathir said: "I'm a servant of the party. I'm loyal to the party. You may be loyal to me only if I do good. When a leader has done wrong, he will bring disaster to the party."

Repeating his appeal to members to close ranks and not allow differences to affect party unity, Dr Mahathir said if there was dissatisfaction it should be thrashed out through discussion. At each assembly, he had never failed to plead for unity among members, he said.

"Actually, I'm desperate. I've pleaded, persuaded, threatened and even cried on this rostrum to drive home my message about unity. But nothing happened... I've done all sorts of things to promote unity but the results are not as I expected.

"Hence, at this assembly, I turn to God asking for help to make Umno members realise the importance of unity. But some people interpreted my doa on Thursday as an attempt to show off instead.

"I pray to God to help open our hearts, eyes and ears and to make us understand the dangers we are facing now. If I say we may be re-colonised, it's not to scare anyone but it's the truth," he said.

Dr Mahathir cited deputy president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi as an example of a loyal member of the party. He said Abdullah was among those in Team B who in the 1987 party election was in an opposing camp to wrest the party leadership. Team B lost and Dr Mahathir remained president.

"Today, he is deputy president and Deputy Prime Minister. This is also due to his loyalty to the party."

Abdullah too had his say on loyalty. The newly-installed deputy president vowed to give his fullest co-operation to Dr Mahathir in carrying out his duties.

All party leaders should join him to help ensure that Dr Mahathir would not be alone in facing challenges within the party and the Government.

The loyalty of party treasurer Tun Daim Zainuddin, who is also Finance Minister, has been a talking point too, but as "market talk".

He said: "I'm just quietly doing my job but my name is often mentioned... about quitting, about a rift... I like to stress here that I do not care about all this.

"I'll continue to work hard for our beloved country, Umno and the Malay race... Of course one day we all have to retire, but this is not for the market to determine."

Others who made reference to the issue were vice-presidents Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib and Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin. Muhammad, who said his "glamorous" other name was Mike Tyson, said the years he was outside government taught him an important lesson.

But he continued to support the party and was loyal to its struggles and leaders. "In the last general election, I helped in the campaign as if I was the candidate," he said.

Muhyiddin, who returned to the party's highest decision-making body after a four-year lapse, said: "I realised that though without any position in the party, it does not mean we cannot contribute and serve the race and religion." He said the four-year absence taught him to be resilient and it was a test of his loyalty.

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