

Ku Li's possible return still open

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KOTA KINABALU: The Prime Minister said yesterday his deputy, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, is next in line to succeed him but he left open the possibility of Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah returning to the Cabinet.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the former finance minister was an Umno member.

"Whatever happens to him (Ku Li) is a question of the process," said Dr Mahathir when asked if he had any plans to bring the Kelantanese prince back into his Cabinet.

The Umno president added

that some of the Semangat 46 leaders were already in the Government, citing Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Rais Yatim as an example.

However, Dr Mahathir said, this did not mean all leaders of a party which joined Umno or Barisan Nasional would necessarily be given government positions.

Acknowledging that there had been talk about Tengku Razaleigh returning to the Cabinet after Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin went on leave last month, Dr Mahathir said: "As far as I'm con-

cerned, he (Ku Li) is an ordinary member of Umno."

Recent speculation centred on a possible Cabinet reshuffle before or immediately after the Umno general assembly in Kuala Lumpur from June 20.

In his speech at a special delegates conference where Parti Akar was dissolved, Dr Mahathir repeatedly asked Umno members to forget past wounds.

"I am asking Umno to accept everyone with open arms. In the past, we have seen how Umno members have not been at ease when members of oth-

er parties joined Umno," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Umno leadership now comprised those who used to oppose the party before.

"My deputy now had supported Tengku Razaleigh during the contest for the Umno presidency in 1987 and when Tengku Razaleigh left Umno, he (Abdullah) stayed.

"Today, Abdullah is the Deputy Prime Minister and the next Prime Minister. It is the same situation for some ministers now," he added in relating the entry of Parti Melayu Semangat 46 members

into Umno three years ago.

He said there were difficulties in some branches and divisions when those in Umno kept seeing the Semangat 46 members as their former enemies.

"The Umno members cannot forget the cruel words uttered by Semangat 46 members in the past. That is why it was so difficult for them to accept the new members," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Umno members should stop harbouring grudges and be willing to accept all those subscribing to the Umno struggles.

"Those who join Umno must be accepted as ordinary members and not considered Umno members from Semangat 46 or Akar," Dr Mahathir said, adding that what was crucial was loyalty to the party.

He said the same situation should prevail if any party member decided to join other Barisan parties and they must be treated fairly.

Asked what his message would be to delegates at the Umno assembly next month, Dr Mahathir said he would focus on finding out why bumiputras were still lagging in the economy.