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Razaleigh: Nation still needs Dr Mahathir's firm leadership

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GUA MUSANG, Sat. - Umno supreme council member Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah today urged Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to continue serving the country if he did not want to see Malaysia ending up like Indonesia.

The former Finance Minister said Dr Mahathir's firm leadership was still needed under the present political and economic climate.

"Sometimes I pity him ... can't retire although he is already 75. Today, we ask him not to retire.

"If he wants to quit when the party has won back Kelantan and Terengganu from Pas, then it is up to him," said Razaleigh, the Gua Musang Umno division chief.

He said this in his speech before Dr Mahathir opened the division's meeting.

Later, at a Press conference, Dr Mahathir said that at his age, he should have gone into retirement.

"However, since I have been requested to continue, it seems like I have to KSM - Kerja Sampai Mati (work until I die)," he quipped.

He said this when asked for his opinion over the call by Razaleigh.

Razaleigh, when making the call, said that he had spoken to several of his friends on the current political scenario in the country.

"Not all of these friends are pro-Dr Mahathir. But we all share the same stand that the country needs to maintain the present leadership.

"We have seen what happened to Indonesia.

"Dr Mahathir is firm in his leadership and this is accepted, not only by the Malays, but also non-Malays."

Razaleigh said the call (for Dr Mahathir to stay on) was a sincere one as it was not his nature to bodek (suck up to) the Prime Minister.

"I have a unique relationship with Dr Mahathir. Others can't say this but I can," he added, in obvious reference to the fact that he used to lead the Opposition front through Umno's splinter party Semangat 46.

Semangat 46 was formed after Razaleigh's failed bid to unseat Dr Mahathir for the Umno presidency in the party's 1987 election.

The party was dissolved in 1996 with its members re-joining Umno en-bloc.

Razaleigh also related the story of how Dr Mahathir decided to come to open the division's AGM.

"I met him a month ago and joked about him coming over here to open the AGM. Then, Dr Mahathir said that he was interested to do so. I went back to my office and faxed an invitation to him immediately in case he changed his mind."

Razaleigh said the last time Dr Mahathir came to Gua Musang to open its division meeting was in 1982 when the constituency was called Ulu Kelantan.

"Today, it is called Gua Musang as it is no more an ulu (remote) area following the development undertaken by the Federal Government through its agencies, including Kesedar (South Kelantan Development Authority)," he said.

Dr Mahathir, in his speech, also expressed surprise over the large turnout and quipped that he did not know that so many people could live in a gua (cave).