

Spirited Umno birthday bash

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15,000 members' join party and veterans at stadium in biggest event

SHAH ALAM, Sat. Umno's 56th anniversary bash today was the biggest ever celebrated, and the first to be held outside the party's headquarters.

About 15,000 Umno members thronged Stadium Malawati here to join party leaders and veterans for the celebration, themed *Perjuangan Sebuah Bangsa*, (The Struggle of a Race).

Spirits were high among those who packed the stadium, many of whom had travelled in chartered buses for the celebration.

Today's event honoured the party's efforts to improve the Malays' standing in society and the contributions of past leaders.

Umno veterans who attended included Tan Sri Aziz Tapa, Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie, Tan Sri Aishah Ghani, Tan Sri Mustaffa Jabbar, Datuk Paduka Saleha Mohd Ali and Tan Sri Azahari Taib.

Former Umno leaders Tan Sri Musa Hitam, Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, Tan Sri Sanusi Junid, Tan Sri Mohamad Rahmat and Datuk Sabbaruddin Chik also attended.

Among the Barisan Nasional leaders who were present were MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu, Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu Sarawak head Tan Sri Taib Mahmud, People's Progressive Party president Datuk M. Kayveas and Gerakan deputy president Tan Sri Koh Tsu Koon.

The celebration began with 1,000 Umno Youth members on motor-cycles escorting party president

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to the stadium.

When he and deputy president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi got on stage, the cheering crowd stood to sing the national anthem.

Then, as the party song *Bersatu Bersetia Berkhidmat* was sung, Dr Mahathir hoisted the party flag. Also sung were Umno Youth's *Ik-rar Pemuda*, Wanita Umno's *Maju Wanita Umno*, Puteri Umno's *Lagu Puteri* and the Barisan Nasional

song.

In his keynote address, Dr Mahathir traced the historical events that led to Umno's inception and spoke of the party's role in uniting the Malays.

He said Umno had led the Bari-

san Nasional Government in achieving tremendous progress for the country, which today is a model for other countries.

Dr Mahathir also reminded the party's young generation that they needed to be knowledgeable and skilled before they could run the party and country.

After addressing the crowd for about an hour, Dr Mahathir proceeded to cut the *pulut kuning* (saffron glutinous rice), a symbolic act equivalent to the cake-cutting ceremony in such celebrations.

Before the ceremony ended, Abdullah, spoke on behalf of all those present. He thanked Dr Mahathir for his advice and guidance as party leader and Prime Minister.

Abdullah gave the assurance that party members would heed Dr Mahathir's advice and would continue to support him.

Speaking earlier in the celebrations, secretary-general Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob reminded party members not to forget the history of Umno's formation.

He also reminded them of their responsibility for continuing Umno's struggle. He said Umno's aspiration was to win back seats that had fallen to the Opposition in the last general election.

To achieve this, members had to listen to the party leadership.

"We have to accept the present leadership in order to formulate a winning strategy," he said.

The Umno leaders will now return home to hold their own State-level celebrations.