

Glowing tribute to Dr M's leadership

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — Umno today paid tribute to its president, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, describing him as a tireless statesman whom Malaysians were privileged to have as their leader.

Deputy Umno president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said under the leadership of Dr Mahathir, who is also Prime Minister, the nation and the people had gone through remarkable and significant transformation, physically, socially, politically and economically.

Speaking at the joint opening of the Wanita, Youth and Puteri Umno general assemblies at the Putra World Trade Centre, Abdullah, who is also Deputy Prime Minister, said under 21 years of Dr Mahathir's leadership, unity and integration among Malaysians of different races had been strengthened while narrow racial sentiments had largely been eliminated.

Abdullah, who described Dr Mahathir as the Umno doctor with a brilliant mind and a compassionate heart, added that during his tenure, the nation had undergone severe tremors while Umno itself had suffered major shocks.

"But our able captain has seen the Malaysian ship through storms and choppy waters. Today, our politics continue to be stable and our party remains strong.

"The voting population continues to swell, the media proliferating and democracy continues to thrive."

Dr Mahathir was given the man-

date to lead Umno from June 28, 1981. "As Prime Minister from July 16, 1981, he has guided and managed our nation for 21 years. Our communications and infrastructure networks are on par with world standards," Abdullah said, citing the country's new administrative centre, Putrajaya and the Multimedia Super Corridor, as examples.

Abdullah said the immense physical developments had influenced the country's social landscape, while the lifestyles, careers, thinking and demands of the people had changed accordingly with the developments.

Statistics showed that 45 per cent of the country's population or 11 million citizens were born during these 21 years. "A percentage of the 11 million will vote and determine who should rule this country in the next general election.

"These people have known no Prime Minister other than Dr Mahathir. The colonial rule is alien to them while the pre-National Economic Policy era is beyond their comprehension."

Having known no other life than these glory years, Abdullah said they were not in the position to evaluate how far Malaysians had come as a people and as a nation in the last 45 years since Independence.

Nonetheless, this was the generation that would determine the shape and face of the future Malaysia.

"This is the generation that will play an important role in etching the colours on the Malaysian canvas. They are the biggest component in determining and spearheading the direction of the Malaysian nation.

"This is the generation that should be absorbed into the Umno struggle so that they will appreciate the sacrifices and efforts of leaders who preceded them."

Abdullah added that this genera-

tion must be awoken to the fact that sacrifices were made over the past 45 years to create the infrastructure the country had today, and that they, in turn, must build upon that infrastructure to keep advancing.

Dr Mahathir's handling of the economy was acknowledged today as a success story that flew in the face of conventional wisdom. "The unique formulas, prudent and pragmatic management of the economy have seen continued growth and prosperity for our people."

Abdullah said Malaysia was no longer a peripheral state nor a passenger in the global community.

"Malaysia has its own identity and self-respect and its voice is heard and respected.

"Today, Malaysia is not a recipient nation but a nation that can contribute both in material and non-material terms," he said.

Dr Mahathir was seen as an Islamic leader who adopted and innovated realistic policies based on moderation and pragmatism.

A tireless statesman who never gave up in the face of adversity and never succumbed to pressure, Dr Mahathir epitomised the qualities that Malaysians should strive for: courage, conscientiousness, meticulousness, punctiliousness and thoroughness.

"Service and sacrifice for the nation are his hallmark. The young Dr Mahathir cycled house to house through padi fields and untarred roads to serve his patients in the rural outskirts of Alor Setar.

"Today, this same doctor flies from country to country and continent to continent to help solve global problems and conflicts.

"Let us pray that Dr Mahathir will continue to be blessed and given the strength and health to lead the nation to greater heights."