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Umno-Tradition

UMNO STICKS TO TRADITION IN LEADERSHIP SUCCESSION, SAYS HISTORIAN

KUALA LUMPUR, July 1 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's move to name Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi as his successor reflects the tradition of an orderly transfer of power which has been practised by Umno all this while, a local historian said today.

Prof Datuk Dr Ramlah Adam of Universiti Malaya said the endorsement given by Barisan Nasional (BN) component parties to Abdullah as the successor to Dr Mahathir was also a recognition of the conduct of Umno politics.

"I think in history succession to the (posts of) Umno president and Prime Minister has occurred naturally, something which happens with the will of Allah and something which has continuity," she told Bernama.

She cited as examples the peaceful transfer of the Umno leadership from Datuk Onn Jaafar to Tunku Abdul Rahman, who subsequently became the first Prime Minister, and then the passing of the baton from Tun Abdul Razak Hussein to Tun Hussein Onn.

Ramlah said the continuity was maintained by Hussein Onn when he named Dr Mahathir as his successor before withdrawing from the helm of the party and government.

"When Dr Mahathir does the same thing for Pak Lah, I feel that this matter is a tradition which clearly has continuity and has been adopted by all quarters in Umno," she said.

Dr Mahathir, who is scheduled to return from a weeklong overseas holiday on Wednesday, made a surprise announcement on his resignation from party and government posts in his winding-up speech at the Umno general assembly on June 22.

He subsequently named Abdullah as his successor in the party and government after his retirement in October next year.

Ramlah said Umno members who have been used to a smooth and orderly transfer of power would not have problems in accepting Abdullah as the party president.

"What they should do is to fully stand behind Pak Lah as the future Umno president and Prime Minister," she said.

"The integrity of Pak Lah is unquestionable because his integrity as an Umno member is very strong," she said.

Ramlah has written about Abdullah, among leaders who are graduates of Universiti Malaya, for a book in conjunction with the university's 50th anniversary in 1999.

She said Abdullah had never left Umno since joining the party at the age of 18.

"His father and grandfather were Umno leaders who had been very committed to Umno until the end of their lives...given this solid background, I think Umno people have no problems respecting and knowing who Pak Lah is," she said.

Abdullah had also gained wide experience as a government administrative officer before venturing into politics, Ramlah said.

"He was formerly assistant secretary of Mageran (National Operations Council) which drafted the New Economic Policy under (the late) Tun Razak; therefore I think his commitment to the Malays and the country is very solid," she said.

She said the transition plan would ensure that all planning could be carried out smoothly.

"This provides for all matters which may be done halfway by the Prime Minister to be continued or maybe new matters proposed, like the teaching of Science and Mathematics in English, to have follow-up action," she said.

-- BERNAMA

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