

21 JUN 2003

Abdullah-WindUp (Tribute)

ABDULLAH LEADS UMNO LEADERS IN PAYING TRIBUTE TO DR M

KUALA LUMPUR, June 21 (Bernama) -- Top Umno leaders today paid highest tribute to Prime Minister and Umno President Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad whom they described as the captain who has successfully steered the country for nearly 22 years.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who represented the Supreme Council members, said since taking over the country's leadership since 1981, Dr Mahathir had placed Umno on a strong footing, winning respect for the country and the people.

He said Islam was also accorded a progressive and dynamic dimension to preach the true teachings which gives priority to the fundamentals of Islam through a realistic approach.

Abdullah's appreciation speech when winding up the debate at the 54th Umno General Assembly received thunderous applause from delegates who also gave him a standing ovation.

The Umno deputy president said under Dr Mahathir's leadership, the people and country underwent a clear transformation in physical, social, political and economic sectors.

During the period, the country and Umno went through various trials and tribulations.

"Nevertheless, our president is a man of wisdom and a clever captain. He has brilliantly navigated the country through waves and storm during the voyage," he said.

Abdullah, who will take over the reins as president and prime minister from Dr Mahathir in October, said Malaysia was fortunate for having an illustrious statesman who does not know disappointment and bow to threats.

Dr Mahathir, he said, is the symbol of a hardworking and brave leader.

He is also the portrait of an illustrious statesman and dynamic leader.

Abdullah said he was thankful to Dr Mahathir for the confidence and trust in him since he becoming prime minister in 1981.

He said only he and International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz are among the ministers in Dr Mahathir's first cabinet who are still around.

"The period does not include the three years and 10 months sabbatical leave I took," he said jokingly, referring to the period he was outside the cabinet.

Saying that everything that happens has its own blessings, Abdullah told the delegates that he received the last award from Dr Mahathir on Thursday when the prime minister gave him a copy of his policy speech which was autographed with a prayer in English.

The prayer reads "May Allah bless you when you take over."

He said he was touched and appreciated the "award" and the trust and confidence given to him while working with Dr Mahathir.

As a mark of the country's and people's appreciation to Dr Mahathir's contributions, the government had accepted the proposal made at the assembly to set up an Institute on Mahathir's Thoughts.

Abdullah also expressed his appreciation to Dr Mahathir's wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamad Ali and their family for "lending her husband and beloved father" to Umno and the country.

He said Dr Siti Hasmah had been the main source of inspiration and strength to Dr Mahathir in serving the party and country.

"She is indeed a doctor who has soothed the hearts and souls of many

people," Abdullah told the delegates, who once again stood up and gave a thunderous applause to show their respect.

Dr Siti Hasmah was seen holding back tears.

On the confidence expressed by delegates for his leadership, Abdullah said his ability to inherit the party's and country's leadership could only be possible with the solid support of Umno members and the people.

He said he chosed "Managing Success" as the theme of his speech when opening the Youth, Wanita and Puteri assemblies on Wednesday as a mark of respect for the successes of the Prime Minister that would be inherited by Umno, the Malays, the people and country.

He said Dr Mahathir had given a successful Umno, Barisan Nasional, Malay race and Malaysians.

Abdullah said all the successes must be managed well so that they would become a strong foundation for excellent progress in future.

"Dr Mahathir's trust in me to take over his post and the support from you all is the trust and responsibility which I accept," he said.

Abdullah ended his speech by pledging to be firm, fair and just in discharging his duties, once again the Dewan Tun Razak erupted in a loud applause from delegates.

-- BERNAMA

JH TM MOZ TS