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Mahathir-Umno (News Analysis)

COUNTRY EAGERLY AWAITING DR MAHATHIR'S PARTING SHOT

By: Zulkfili Salleh

ALOR STAR, May 30 (Bernama) -- Umno members and Malaysians in general are looking forward to the Umno general assembly, which will be held three weeks from now, with a great sense of expectation as Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will be delivering his final presidential address before retiring in October.

Will the Umno president be delivering a magical parting shot for the party he has led for more than 20 years, particularly to ensure that it remains strong and continues to be accepted by the people?

Expectations are running high because what comes last usually carries special significance. Like the general assembly, the Kubang Pasu Umno delegates conference last Friday was also the last for Dr Mahathir in his capacity as the division's chief.

And the prime minister used the occasion to impart some solid advice to party members during his 90-minute opening address and also winding-up speech.

Delivering his speech in simple and clear language but in all seriousness, Dr Mahathir repeatedly reminded Umno members to check the tendency to ask, "what can I get by struggling for Umno?"

Dr Mahathir was very worried that such a narrow outlook and attitude of placing emphasis on personal interests would weaken Umno and cause the people, especially the Malays, to hate the party.

He retraced the disasters wrought on the party by such a negative attitude, from the pre-Independence era until now.

He said once the "what can I get?" attitude reared its ugly head, the party would start to weaken as members would isolate themselves and struggle on their own.

When a handful of people among Umno members with religious education did not get government posts, they alleged that ulamas were sidelined and set up PMIP, which is now known as PAS.

According to him, this "what can I get?" attitude subsequently led to the formation of Semangat 46 and Keadilan.

Dr Mahathir expressed his concern that members with such an attitude might cause the people to hate Umno and reject the party.

Such self-centred members were only willing to work hard before getting party posts and would neglect their responsibilities to the voters after becoming elected representatives.

Dr Mahathir regretted that these people had failed to see the bigger picture of achieving success for Umno because when the party was successful the country and all the people would stand to reap the benefits.

"No one could say that he has not gained anything from Umno's struggle. We are all enjoying facilities which were not available previously, like roads, electricity and water supply, and educational opportunities which make it possible for children of poor people to become doctors, lawyers and the like.

"During British colonial rule, amenities like roads were built only for the interests of the colonialists, that is from plantations and mines to the ports to bring the riches of this country to Britain," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Umno was among the few political parties which fought for the country's independence which were still supported by the people, as the others had become history because their members were preoccupied with the fight for posts.

After leading Umno for so many years, he would certainly be glad to hand over the reins to Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi with the party remaining strong to face the party elections next year.

"In Umno there are now efforts by members to promote themselves as candidates. It is not wrong to aspire to be a candidate but not to the extent of making people hate Umno. This can happen if we do not stop the scramble to get positions and to become rich," Dr Mahathir said.

"Do not scramble for the posts of president, division chief, branch chief. The people will be disappointed," he said.

"Ask not what the nation can give you but ask what you can give to the nation," said Dr Mahathir, adding that if all Umno members practised this spirit, God willing, Umno would continue to get the support of the people.

Dr Mahathir also warned Umno members not to be complacent by assuming that the Umno struggle had been completed just because the country had been liberated and was developing.

-- BERNAMA

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