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Mahathir-Assembly

DR MAHATHIR WOULD MISS THE AVENUE TO EXPLAIN

KUALA LUMPUR, June 21 (Bernama) -- Having attended the Umno General Assembly for the past 22 years, retiring party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he would miss most the opportunity to explain, close ranks and continue with the struggles provided by the assembly.

He said he would miss the opportunity to explain because he realised many people need to be enlightened on things they did not understand, and the assembly provided such an opportunity.

"I would miss the criticism against the government, against the party and the way they accept final explanation about things and at the end of all this we always close ranks.

"So I would miss this opportunity to be able to explain why we are doing certain things that we do because I realised that many of the things people don't understand, and it needs to be explained and this assembly provides us with opportunity to explain, to close ranks and to continue with the struggles," he told a press conference at the end of the 54th Umno General Assembly at the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC) here today.

He said this when asked what would he miss most about the assembly after attending it for the last 22 years.

Answering another question, Dr Mahathir said Umno had regained its vitality after explaining to the Malays political developments which led to Umno losing support in the 1999 General Election.

"I told myself that the moment I became Prime Minister the first thing I thought of was I would never do anything that will anger people. But (sometimes) I was forced to do it. It is not my choice, and what I did was all within the law."

Asked to describe his feelings after attending the general assembly, Dr Mahathir said: "It is gratifying to see there is so much evidence of support for the party, and I am leaving at a time when I have restored the party. I feel gratified that things are as they are."

Dr Mahathir said he was surprised at himself for not being emotional at the end of his closing speech today, contrary to what had been expected of him by delegates.

"I am surprised at myself. I was afraid to make that speech in case I misbehaved again. But God is great. I managed to go through it without the famous breakdown that I (usually) have," he said.

Asked on his plans after retirement in October, Dr Mahathir said he might write a book on his experience in the various government posts he had held.

Queried on his immediate plans after the assembly, he said: "I would like to rest-lah, so tomorrow don't disturb."

When asked whether he was satisfied with his final speech as Umno president, he said: "To me, I am satisfied. There were sajak, pantun (poems) too, okaylah."

Dr Mahathir was also asked about the points he raised on PAS in his speech.

He stressed that it was the responsibility of Umno to bring back some Muslims in this country to the path of Islam after they had been influenced by PAS, which was using the religion for political gains.

On whether his speech indicated that Malaysia would become more Islamic, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia was already an Islamic state and there was nothing more to prove.

"It is already there. What do you want us to do? Wear the jubah, wear turbans and go around looking like artificial Arabs, synthetic Arabs, virtual Arabs?"

"We are Muslims. Sixty per cent of the people in this country are Muslims, and the (remaining) 40 per cent accept the fact that it is a Muslim country. We don't have to prove (anything) to anybody," he said.

Asked what Umno should do to beat PAS in the general elections, the prime minister said the answer was simple.

"If all (members) rally behind whoever was picked as candidates, then Umno will win. No one would feel disappointed, do not want to cooperate; no operations room will be closed because of disagreement over candidates," he said.

When asked about his former deputy Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, the prime minister said: "He is in jail. If the party wants to accept him after I left, I have no right to say no. But, you know, when you are in the party you must fight for the party.

"But if you are in the party in order to take things for yourself, to subvert people with bribes, I do not think that will result in good leadership."

Dr Mahathir reiterated that he would resign from all posts in the government, party and Barisan Nasional.

"I will hold no post at all; I will not be a senior president," he said, adding that he would stay as finance minister until October.

When asked to sum up the highlights and disappointments of his 22 years at the helm of the party, Dr Mahathir said: "Sometimes there were anxious moments too. When there were defections, I felt sad. But these things happen in politics. In politics, no situation is always the same, does not change."

Dr Mahathir said his experience showed that in politics friends could become foes and foes could become friends.

"Sometimes I feel sad, after that I feel happy a bit, then sad again, then happy again -- like the stock market," he said while using his hand to show the movements of a roller coaster, a gesture which drew laughter from those present.

-- BERNAMA

MAM JM YBY