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Umno-Sulaiman

PERMANENT CHAIRMAN SAD AT MISSING UMNO GENERAL ASSEMBLY

By: Zurina Yusof

PETALING JAYA, June 18 (Bernama) -- Umno permanent chairman Tun Sulaiman Ninam Shah is sad that he could not attend this year's Umno General Assembly, the last to be opened by Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad as the president.

He had never missed the previous assemblies in his 28 years as permanent chairman but is forced to skip the ongoing one because he is suffering from leukaemia.

"I am sad that I could not attend, especially when the assembly is Dr Mahathir's last as Umno president and prime minister. By right I should be with them because my term ends next year, but what could I do if health does not permit?" he told Bernama in an interview at his house here today.

The duties of permanent chairman at the assembly, which begins at the Putra World Trade Centre tomorrow, will be assumed by Sulaiman's deputy, Datuk Seri Onn Ismail.

His speech will be read out by Onn, and Sulaiman believes that his deputy is capable of handling the assembly well.

"I am confident that Datuk Onn can lead Umno (assemblies) in future if he receives the support of delegates," he said.

Sulaiman said his deputy might not be as witty as he was in running the assembly because Onn was younger.

"I hope the delegates would show some patience ... (he) cannot be expected to crack as many jokes as I did since I am a veteran ... for a younger person it would be a bit difficult," he said.

During the interview, Sulaiman looked weak but was very enthusiastic when talking about the assembly.

Sulaiman, 84, had been hospitalised for more than two months because of leukaemia.

"I have been asked to go to Pantai (Hospital) tomorrow or the day after for another month of treatment," he said.

Asked on his advice to delegates, Sulaiman said: "I hope Umno members will uphold the Umno struggle. Don't surrender even an inch because Umno is the only party that can protect the Malays."

He reminded party members to remain united and to give solid support to the leadership.

Sulaiman said he had remained with the party through thick and thin, and he hoped that other members would be just as loyal.

"Umno members should not ignore the veterans because they were the ones who fought for Malay rights earlier on," he said.

Asked on the prime minister's statement that members should not jostle for posts to avoid splitting the party, Sulaiman said the party leadership should be given 100 percent support.

He also said Dr Mahathir had made a wise decision in picking Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to succeed him in the government and the party. Dr Mahathir is retiring in October.

Sulaiman also expressed his gratitude to all Supreme Council members for their support.

-- BERNAMA

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