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Umno-Election  
UMNO READY FOR GENERAL ELECTION

By: Zulkefli Salleh

KUALA LUMPUR, June 21 (Bernama) -- Umno is stronger now and is all fired up for the general election, judging from the signs emerging from the 54th Umno General Assembly.

This time the opposition parties will have to face a more united, spirited and confident Umno compared to the situation in the last general election in 1999.

The power struggle that the opposition hopes will happen and weaken the party following the transition of power in October is unlikely to happen.

In fact, the retirement of Prime Minister and Umno President Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in October, which has been accepted by party members with a "heavy heart", has become a factor of "strength."

They want to ensure Umno secures a bigger victory to ensure the Barisan Nasional (BN) can defend its two-thirds majority as a "retirement gift" to Dr Mahathir from party members, according to several delegates.

Umno Supreme Council member Datuk Azmi Khalid said the mood of the delegates showed that they have accepted the call by Dr Mahathir in his presidential address that members should enhance party unity, set aside personal interests and give priority to Umno to face the general election.

Dr Mahathir, apart from underlining the steps for Umno's future, also listed the successes of the Malays and Malaysia since the party helmed the country's leadership.

Umno members are now more confident that the party is more Islamic than other parties which profess to struggle for Islam.

In fact, they can take pride in Umno's achievements and track record in developing the country and the people after spearheading the struggle for the country's independence 46 years ago.

The delegates have pledged their solid support to Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi as Dr Mahathir's successor.

The three vice-presidents -- Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib and Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin -- have also openly voiced their backing for Abdullah.

They have also said publicly that they will accept Abdullah's decision on whom he picks as deputy prime minister, who by tradition will be accepted as Umno deputy president.

With this, the fear expressed by Dr Mahathir in the run-up to the assembly that there might be a contest for the deputy president's post in the party elections next year, no longer posed a threat to party unity.

The split in Umno following the fight for the president's and deputy president's posts in 1987 will not recur.

The delegates have welcomed Dr Mahathir's criticism against leaders and members who sabotage Umno candidates to vent their frustrations.

This has made anybody trying to weaken party unity to be seen as a "black sheep," they said.

The delegates seemed to have been touched by the sincerity and commitment shown by Dr Mahathir in pursuing Umno's struggles.

The extent of Dr Mahathir's sincerity in struggling for more than two decades for Umno and the Malays was relected in his prayer towards the end of his presidential speech at the assembly which has touched the hearts of delegates and party members.

In a voice choked with emotions, Dr Mahathir said: "Allah be praised, for having given his insignificant slave this opportunity. I pray to Him to

protect my race from the bad qualities and make them a people who are successful and honoured, who submit fully to all that our holy religion has taught us, to make them work hard, that You may protect and bring success to our people in order to become the model to the Muslim ummah, the people who submit to all your injunctions, Oh Allah, Amin.

That's the difference between a genuine Muslim leader and others -- after working hard to boost the image of the race and Muslims, conclude with a prayer at the end of his struggle.

"If Dr Mahathir can love the party and the race, and struggle to boost the image of Islam, we, as members, should also have the same feelings and spirit," said an Umno supporter.

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