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Umno (Roundup)

UMNO GENERAL ASSEMBLY ENDS WITH UNITY PLEDGE

By: Ali Mamat

KUALA LUMPUR, June 21 (Bernama) -- The singing of legendary entertainer the late Tan Sri P. Ramlee's song "Di mana Kan Ku Cari Ganti" by Selangor representative Datuk Zainal Sakom and other delegates aptly summed up the closing scenes of the 54th Umno General Assembly here today.

While reaffirming their determination to uphold the party's struggles, none of the delegates and leaders to the three-day assembly has failed to express their sadness over the fact that this is the last general assembly for Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad as the Umno president.

The same atmosphere was also evident in the vicinity of the conference hall at Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC), which was thronged by thousands of people who turned up to follow the president's winding-up speech live on television.

Dr Mahathir, who has been steering Umno through thick and thin for more than 20 years, has announced that he would be giving up his government and party posts in October.

He has also named his deputy, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, as his successor for both posts.

Reading the lyrics of the song line by line, one can well understand the deep sense of loss felt by not only Umno members but also Malaysians in general with regard to Dr Mahathir's retirement.

However, in his winding-up speech, Dr Mahathir somewhat eased the emotion-filled atmosphere by directing their focus to more pressing issues which, if neglected, could threaten Umno and jeopardise the race, religion and nation.

This included urging Umno members to pool their resources to face opposition parties in the next general election, especially PAS which has been described as a thorn in Muslims' flesh for distorting Islamic teachings.

Dr Mahathir also reminded Umno members and leaders to give their undivided support to Abdullah when he leads the party and the country, especially in facing threats posed by foreign powers against the country and Muslims.

Abdullah also played his role to keep emotions in check. In his winding-up address, he assured members that although Dr Mahathir had decided to retire, the prime minister would continue contributing to the party by giving advice and ideas.

Abdullah also pledged to consider calls to set up an "Institute of Dr Mahathir's Thoughts" to honour his contributions to the country and to ensure that the visionary ideas and suggestions of the prime minister would be put to good use.

Abdullah also told the delegates that Dr Mahathir had given him an assurance that he would always be prepared to spare his time, energy and thoughts for the sake of Umno's struggles.

"Just tell me, I will be there to help you," Abdullah quoted Dr Mahathir as telling him.

This assurance and Dr Mahathir's jokes in his speech definitely helped to calm the situation.

As Abdullah put it, this assembly can be considered the biggest ever display of Malay unity as all quarters have pledged to support whomever he picks as deputy prime minister after he takes over as prime minister.

They included all the three vice-presidents -- Tan Sri Muhyiddin

Yassin, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak and Tan Sri Muhammad Muhamad Taib -- one of whom, by tradition, will fill the Umno deputy president's and the deputy prime minister's posts.

Apart from pledging support, all of them also promised to continue with the Umno struggle, irrespective of whether or not they were appointed as the deputy prime minister by Abdullah.

These pledges have enabled the delegates to return home with full confidence and a burning desire to fulfil all the promises made at the assembly.

-- BERNAMA

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