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BN leaders pay tribute to Dr Mahathir

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Barisan Nasional component party leaders along with 3,000 members tonight paid tribute to former chairman Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, acknowledging his tremendous contributions to the coalition and the country.

At a dinner, they pledged to support and take steps to ensure Dr Mahathir's visions are accomplished under the leadership of BN chairman and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Present were Dr Mahathir's wife Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, his wife Datuk Rosmah Mansor, ministers, Menteri Besar, BN secretary-general Tan Sri Mohamed Rahmat and leaders of all component parties, including MCA president Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting and MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu.

Abdullah called on all component parties to show their appreciation of Dr Mahathir by ensuring a landslide victory for the coalition in the next general election.

"We do not just want a victory, we want a two-thirds majority," he said, adding this could be achieved if all members worked together. The Prime Minister said a convincing victory would fulfil Dr Mahathir's New Year wish. "Realising his aim must be our mission."

Abdullah described Dr Mahathir as a leader who had brought pride and dignity to all Malaysians.

"There are many countries which are independent but lack dignity or honour. They have to contend with civil wars and unrest. But Malaysia is an independent nation with dignity."

On a personal note, Abdullah said Dr Mahathir had given him a sense of pride not because he had assumed the Prime Minister's post, but because he was proud to be a Malaysian. "He has taught all Malaysians the true meaning of being an independent country."

Abdullah said Dr Mahathir's stellar leadership was a difficult act to follow, but he believed Malaysians would work hard to emulate his work ethics.

"The best way to thank Dr Mahathir and to remember his deeds is to work hard and help realise his vision. "Tun, we are proud of you and I say, 'We love you.'"

Abdullah also praised Dr Siti Hasmah, whom he described as a role model for all women.

"We thank you. You looked after Dr Mahathir very well. I believe he managed to lead the country effectively because he never had problems at home."

In his speech, Dr Mahathir said he was willing to campaign for the BN.

"If I am invited, I am ready to meet the people and help in the campaign. This will be my repayment to the BN for its support of me."

Dr Mahathir, in jest, said he knew there were certain places in the country where the people would not like to see him.

"The BN should not be shy in telling me not to go there, but there are other places where I can be of help. I pray that BN unity will continue so that we can win the election," he said.

Organising chairman of the dinner Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yeik said the former Prime Minister had left behind a strong legacy for his successor to continue.

He said the country's achievements in economics, politics and foreign

relations brought about by Dr Mahathir were a priceless contribution.

He assured Dr Mahathir that his vision was achievable under Abdullah's leadership.

"Dr Mahathir has positioned Malaysia in the international arena and his visions have moved Malaysia up the value chain. This is evident in the acceptance of Malaysian products abroad.

"His initiatives and projects, including the Multimedia Super Corridor, and the emphasis he placed on the K-economy have inspired Malaysians to take on greater challenges.

"It was under his helm that leaders of other developing countries looked towards Malaysia as a model."

He said Dr Mahathir's vision for the nation was shared by all Malaysians, and the focus now should be to develop the country's "software" as the "hardware" and infrastructure had been well developed.

The BN component parties, he said, supported Abdullah's call for the country's transition from a "First World infrastructure but with a Third World mentality" to "a country with First World infrastructure and First World mentality".

"We believe Abdullah will be announcing more initiatives for the betterment and development of the country and it is our mission to ensure these efforts are accomplished."

Earlier, Abdullah presented Dr Mahathir with a painting by artist Ismail Embong that depicted the handover of the chairmanship of the BN from Dr Mahathir to Abdullah.