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Dropped leaders must support new line-up, says Dr M

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today Umno leaders who are dropped as candidates in the next general election should lend their support to the new lineup and ensure a Barisan Nasional victory.

When a new leader is elected to power, it is expected of him to have his own line-up, the Prime Minister said. "I did not mean that all Umno leaders should not contest in the next general election and I did not ask anyone to resign.

"It is natural for some leaders to be dropped and they have to accept this as a fact. We will maintain those who can still contribute to the party and the country. There is no need for the leaders to issue statements saying that they want to resign.

"When the time comes for election, all quarters should work hard whether or not one is selected as a candidate," Dr Mahathir, who is Umno president and BN chairman, said after chairing the Umno supreme council meeting today.

Earlier in Alor Gajah, Dr Mahathir said elected representatives holding government posts, including Cabinet Ministers, should be prepared to make way for a new team when Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi takes over as Prime Minister.

Clarifying his earlier call for them to resign from their respective positions, he said he was not barring anyone from seeking reelection but just telling them to be prepared to vacate their appointed positions.

"I never said not to seek reelection. I said resign so as to leave it to the new leader to pick his man. He may retain the same person or he may choose another person. That is his right.

"It is for them to resign and give the new leader a chance to make his choice ...this is for the next election. I'm not asking them to resign now."

Asked if the advice also applied to Cabinet members, he said: "Yes! It applies to everybody, but I'm not asking them to resign now."

The Prime Minister was in Alor Gajah to open Honda Malaysia Sdn Bhd's manufacturing and assembly plant in Pegoh.

He said "not seeking re-election" was the personal choice of the elected representatives and not his.

"If they don't want (to seek re-election) they can say they don't want but everybody should be willing to allow the leader to pick his own man or woman," he explained.

Dr Mahathir was asked to clarify his remarks on the "resignation" statement which he made when responding to media queries last week upon his return from the World Economic Forum in Davos.

There has been widespread speculation on the nature of Dr Mahathir's advice: Whether it applied only to Umno elected representatives and was confined to the State level, or if it was a blanket statement.

The word "resign" by itself had sent shivers, not only to elected representatives in Umno, but to all in the Barisan Nasional.

Asked whether he would consider staying on as Prime Minister if the country's economy stalled, Dr Mahathir said: "No. I think I have to put the economy right as it can be ...after me it is somebody else".

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