

07/11/2003

Nik Aziz comes under fire over remarks on Dr Mahathir

Sajahan Waheed; Ahmad Fairuz Othman

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Pas has come under fire for a statement by its spiritual leader Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat that Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad stepped down as Prime Minister because the party had pressured him to do so.

Umno Youth chief Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein said today Nik Aziz's statement was typical of the party's attention-grabbing strategy.

He said Pas had never been sincere in its struggle to implement Islam at all levels as claimed by the party's leaders.

Pas, he said, was not practising what it preached and that made it difficult to trust the party's motives.

"If their recent statement was a political strategy, then their hudud is also a strategy, their pact in the Opposition front is also a strategy, their two manifestos and all their ceramah and arguments are all part of that strategy."

Hishammuddin was speaking after chairing the Umno Youth executive council meeting here.

Hishammuddin said this when asked to comment on Nik Aziz's statement on Tuesday that it was Pas' tactic of forcing Dr Mahathir to retire by claiming that he (Dr Mahathir) was playacting (bersandiwara) regarding his intention to resign.

Nik Aziz, who is also the Kelantan Menteri Besar, said the purpose of Pas, including himself, in insisting Dr Mahathir was only play-acting was to make sure that the former Prime Minister truly fulfilled his pledge to relinquish all posts.

Nik Aziz claimed that Dr Mahathir "used to change his mind on many matters" and if Pas did not play up the issue, he could again change his mind about retiring.

Umno vice-president Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib said that Dr Mahathir stepped down because he wanted to pass over the country's administration to others and not because of the pressure from Pas.

"He was sincere and honest and did so out of his own willingness," he said.

Muhammad said it was unbecoming of "religious leaders in Pas" to hurl various accusations against Dr Mahathir instead of appreciating his immense contribution to the country.

He said Nik Aziz should realise that Malaysia's success and development was a result of the hard work, commitment and the vision of Dr Mahathir.

He said that Dr Mahathir had always been sincere in his intention to resign ever since making it known at the Umno general assembly in June last year.

Puteri Umno head Datuk Azalina Othman Said said that Pas leaders must take a closer look at themselves before making accusations against others especially Dr Mahathir, held in high esteem by the people.

Azalina said that Nik Aziz himself had been the Kelantan Menteri Besar for 13 years and he showed no signs of retiring and passing on the post to a younger leader.

"Nik Aziz should not simply make statements or accusations against others without studying the situation in his own party.

"Most of Pas leaders are not keen in grooming young leaders and are interested in retaining their own posts."

Azalina said it had always been the way for Pas leaders "to gain cheap

publicity" by making statements which did not have any substance.

"Pas leaders feel embarrassed now as they had previously kept saying that Dr Mahathir would not resign and this has been proven wrong.

"So, to cover up, they are coming out with such senseless statements."

Azalina said Dr Mahathir had proven himself a credible leader, and was consistent in his decision.

"The tribute and gratitude shown by the public when Dr Mahathir resigned is proof of the love and respect the people have for him.

"Malaysians generally felt very sad to let Dr Mahathir go."