

19/06/2003

Pledge to strengthen foundation (HL)

Noor Adzman Baharuddin; Ramlan Said

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Given a stark reminder of challenges facing the party and country, delegates to the Umno Youth, Wanita and Puteri assemblies today collectively urged members to redouble their efforts for the next general election and ensure Umno was free from power struggles.

They pledged to continue with the struggle of past leaders and to strengthen the foundation laid by party president and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for unity and transformation.

United and tenacious, speaker after speaker delivered a wake-up call and drove home a common message: close ranks, eliminate discord and crank up the election machinery at all levels.

Asking the audience to take a leaf from the history of the party and nation, delegates spoke passionately of the importance of a smooth transition of power, a reference to the passing of the baton from Dr Mahathir to Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in October.

The hopes of the delegates were not confined to the three halls of the Putra World Trade Centre where the assemblies were simultaneously held.

Endorsement of Abdullah as the next party president and Prime Minister was echoed by observers and non-delegates who thronged the corridors of the PWTC.

Even those busy peddling their wares at the exposition area and shoppers were caught up in small talk over the succession in the party's top leadership, the first in 22 years.

Youth chief Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein told delegates gathered at Dewan Tun Dr Ismail:

"We believe the transition of power will proceed without any incident that will jeopardise party unity."

In what sounded like a word of caution, Hishammuddin declared the movement would hold senior party leaders to their promises that there would be no tussle for the deputy president's post in the party elections next year.

The party's three vice-presidents - Datuk Seri Najib Razak, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin and Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib - have pledged not to challenge the person chosen by Abdullah to be Deputy Prime Minister when he takes over as Prime Minister.

Wanita chief Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz also reminded her members not to let the selection of candidates for the general election become a divisive issue among rank and file.

"Dr Mahathir has brought progress to the people and country. It is crucial we strengthen the foundation he has laid.

"It is equally important we work hard towards realising his vision of achieving developed nation status."

Rafidah called on members to extend to Abdullah the full support that they had given to Dr Mahathir.

Puteri head Azalina Othman Said, delivering her first address at the movement's maiden assembly, paid tribute to Dr Mahathir for his contributions to and sacrifices for the party and nation.

She also pledged the movement's undivided support for Abdullah.

"Pak Lah has been given the mandate to lead the party.

"We have full confidence in his ability to lead the country and party. It is a responsibility which he will execute brilliantly."

She spoke confidently on the coming general election.

"We are well prepared. We have our own programmes, especially on how to get the votes in Kelantan and Terengganu."

Judging from today's proceedings, delegates seemed to have taken to heart Dr Mahathir's plain-speaking pep talk he gave the day before the assembly.

His advice to place party above self struck a chord with them, especially among of Youth and Puteri members.

A delegate summed up best the mood and expectations of the assemblies.

"All signs point towards Umno's continued dominance and leadership in bringing the race, religion and nation to greater heights."

The assembly proper starts tomorrow, when Dr Mahathir will deliver his last presidential address.