

01/11/2003

Umno leaders pledge to work for party unity

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Umno leaders bade farewell to former party president Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad with a pledge to continue working hard for the party's unity.

Wanita Umno chief Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz said she was sad that Dr Mahathir was leaving after having worked with him for a long time.

"It is only Dr Mahathir and myself who are left from the Umno supreme council which existed during the time of Tun Abdul Razak as party president.

"With Dr Mahathir's departure I am the only one left and I really feel that loss. I see it as a transition from the old generation to the new," said Rafidah after attending the breaking of fast at the Putra World Trade Centre yesterday.

Some 3,000 Umno members and leaders of Barisan Nasional component parties participated in the event which was also attended by Dr Mahathir and Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Umno secretary-general Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob said he was touched by Dr Mahathir's retirement because he had served with him for a long time.

Khalil said he was happy with the current transition of power and had full confidence in the new leadership.

He said a special farewell ceremony for Dr Mahathir would be arranged after Ramadan.

"Party members want to express their thanks to him. The party's management committee and respective State liaison committees will determine a suitable date for the ceremony."

Johor Umno head Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman said the most important parting advice Dr Mahathir gave was the call to strengthen Umno by refraining from internal bickering. "It was his clearest message, to ensure the party continues to be strong and united."

He said the best gift Umno members could give Dr Mahathir upon his retirement was to pledge continued unity.

Perlis Umno head Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim said Umno was strong because its members supported the party's leaders.

"We will support whoever Abdullah chooses as Deputy Prime Minister. We don't care if it is someone from the supreme council or outside the council, that is his right."

Puteri Umno chief Datuk Azalina Othman Said said she was sad to lose a leader who was very young at heart. "I look at him and see someone who still has a few more years as the Prime Minister."

She said Dr Mahathir was making a big sacrifice to allow new leaders to assume important party posts.

Azalina said she hoped more of the younger generation would support Umno under the leadership of Abdullah.

Umno Youth executive council member Datuk Abd Rauf Yusof said Dr Mahathir's leadership qualities should serve as an inspiration for the youth leaders.