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Umno-Debate (States)

STATE UMNO LEADERS PAY TRIBUTE TO DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, June 19 (Bernama) -- Despite Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's reminder to delegates not to praise him excessively at the Umno general assembly, which is his last as party president, all the state Umno liaison heads were extremely generous in paying tribute to the leader.

They expressed appreciation for the Prime Minister's contribution at the party and national level when debating the president's policy speech at the party's 54th general assembly at the Putra World Trade Centre, here.

At the same time, they expressed support for and confidence in his successor, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Unlike past practices, in conjunction with Dr Mahathir's retirement in October, the liaison heads were given the opportunity to debate the policy speech instead of members of the state delegations.

Kelantan Umno liaison head Datuk Mustapa Mohamed proposed that the government set up the Institute of Dr Mahathir Mohamad's Thoughts in recognition of the Prime Minister's contribution for Malaysia.

He said it normally took 50, 100 or 200 years to develop a civilisation, but Dr Mahathir took only 22 years to build a new era of Islamic civilisation.

"The Prime Minister has succeeded in changing the lifestyle of the people and building up the resilience and mind of the Muslims. He is also the only leader who dares to criticise the attitude of the Malays," he said.

Besides being described as a patriot and nationalist, Dr Mahathir's hands-on approach and the "stronger when I'm challenged" attitude had been proven when he succeeded in overcoming the economic crisis that had crippled many economies in the region while Malaysia recovered within a short period," he said.

Among his achievements were the success of the national car

company,
Proton, in developing Bumiputera skills in industry and the success
of
Permodalan Nasional Bhd (PNB) in pooling up the largest Bumiputera
investment fund.

Dr Mahathir's visionary attitude was also proven with Langkawi's
success as a tax-free island although a previous study by the
Finance
Ministry and Customs on the proposal had suggested that it was not
viable.

Negeri Sembilan Umno Liaison head Tan Sri Mohamed Isa Abdul
Samad, in
his debate, said Dr Mahathir possessed an extraordinary gift in that
he
could accurately anticipate events within and outside the country.

Isa, who is also Negeri Sembilan Menteri Besar, said this
special
ability enabled Dr Mahathir to analyse things accurately and "this
extraordinary gift has saved us".

He also expressed the state's solid support for the leadership
of
deputy president Datuk Seri Abdullah who would take over the helm of
the
party and country after Dr Mahathir's retirement in October.

Selangor Umno liaison head Datuk Seri Dr Mohamad Khir Toyo
thanked Dr
Mahathir for his role in developing Selangor to the extent that it
had
emerged as the most developed state in Malaysia.

He said the country was fortunate to have been administered by
smart,
trustworthy and bold leaders in the past and presently.

Melaka Umno liaison head Datuk Wira Mohamed Ali Rustam said the
best
gift for Dr Mahathir would be for Umno to achieve a big win at the
next
general election.

"The best way for us to express support for Datuk Seri (Dr
Mahathir)
and Pak Lah (Abdullah) is at the next general election. Retake all
the
seats that we had lost besides retaining the ones we have won," he
said.

With a membership of three million, he said it was not difficult
for
Umno to win at the next general election.

"There are 10 million voters throughout the country. There are
six
million Malays and three million Umno members. So, I suggest that we
set a
target of 60 per cent Bumiputeras to become Umno members.

"...so that at the general election, we have already garnered 10

per cent of the votes. What is important is the loyalty of Umno members to the party," said Mohamed Ali, who is also Melaka Chief Minister.

Sabah Umno is determined to continue with the state's development after Dr Mahathir's leadership besides ensuring that zero opposition remained and was synonymous with Sabah.

Although the mandate for the Barisan Nasional (BN) government in Sabah would end in March next year, the Umno-led state government had never been complacent, said Sabah liaison head Datuk Musa Aman.

He said there was no place for members who were not committed to the Umno cause in Sabah because Umno was not a "transit point" as it was the pulse of the national struggles.

Musa also said Umno membership in Sabah was increasing to almost half a million compared with only 200,000 members 12 years ago, and represented the second highest state after Johor in terms of membership.

Perlis Umno liaison head Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim suggested the setting up of the "Mahathir Centre" or the centre for Dr Mahathir's thoughts for a deeper understanding of the Prime Minister's thoughts which had received recognition at the national and international level.

He said the move was appropriate because Dr Mahathir was an "Umno Prince" and had spent part of his life to champion the party's cause.

Kedah Umno liaison head Datuk Seri Syed Razak Syed Zain said Dr Mahathir had made two important changes from the aspects of social structure and procedures. The first was to change the way of thinking of the Malays from the subsidy mentality to that of self-reliant.

Secondly, the inadequacy of the Malays who were frequently described as being modest and lacked confidence, had been changed to the "Malaysia boleh" spirit which was also appreciated by the other races.

The Menteri Besar called on all Kedah Umno members to strengthen solidarity and ensure a thumping victory in the next general election as a retirement gift for the Umno president.

Deputy head of the Terengganu Umno liaison body Datuk Idris Jusoh said while Umno was going through a leadership transition, Terengganu Umno was

determined to recapture the state administration as a sign of appreciation for the contributions of Dr Mahathir and Abdullah, after the state was lost to PAS in the 1999 general election.

He said the seriousness shown by both leaders had seen Terengganu Umno strength becoming more stable with improved support for Umno from the people.

-- BERNAMA

MAN RAR KHY RON AO