

Dr M: Pak Lah was to serve only one term
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Abdullah Ahmad Badawi was to serve one term as prime minister before making way for his deputy, revealed his predecessor Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The former premier said he had expected Abdullah to be an 'interim prime minister' before handing over the reins to the more popular Najib Tun Razak.

"There was no agreement, but I expected him to serve one term. Now it seems he wants three terms," Mahathir told reporters yesterday.

"Najib was more popular, he was [Umno] vice-president. It would be unfair for him," said Mahathir, adding that Abdullah was chosen partly because of the age factor. Abdullah is 67, while Najib is 52.

He was speaking to reporters after a brief question-and-answer session at a luncheon held at Kelab Darul Ehsan in Ampang Jaya.

Earlier, he told some 300 Umno Pandan Selangor division members he chose Abdullah because of his 'Mr Clean' image.

No apology to Pak Lah

Mahathir was also adamant that he did not apologise to Abdullah for making comments that his family benefited from his premiership.

He was referring comments he made two weeks ago, that Abdullah's son, Kamaludin, owned a RM60 million mansion in Perth, Australia.

"I did not apologise to Abdullah. I apologised to the public because what I commented on was based on rumours. It was an apology on factual mistakes," he said.

In his speech at the luncheon, he cited the history of Umno and its "struggle to achieve independence from the colonial masters" and that Umno has a habit of discarding leaders such as party founder Onn Jaafar and Tunku Abdul Rahman despite "their great contributions and achievements."

Mahathir hinted however that they were sacked or sidelined through democratic means, and lamented that Umno does not give him leeway for his party activities.

"When [former finance minister] Tengku Razaleigh, [former deputy prime minister] Musa Hitam and [prime minister] Abdullah [Ahmad Badawi] mounted a challenge against me, I allowed them to travel freely, up and down the country, to speak with party members. And when the fight was over they were let in, given ministerial posts," he said.

Mahathir lamented that a total of 14 invitations for him to speak at party functions were cancelled.

"The branches were threatened by the police. This is illegal, out of the bounds of law. It is wrong to use the people to stop people from speaking out. It is a new habit of Umno. People have accused me of being a tyrant, of using the ISA. But the ISA was a legal mean, nothing illegal."

He also said Umno members must be allowed to speak out.

"Voters must now be aware of their surroundings... however there are some who prefer to keep their eyes, ears and nose closed. They prefer to have their [orifices] sumbat (stuffed) and be blinded by things such as money, contracts, APs [approved permits]."

"If leaders are just leaders because they want to to stay in power, then the shouldn't be leaders," he added.

Be loyal wisely

The former premier also spoke of Malaysia's "450 years of colonisation" and correlated that with his argument that Umno members should speak out.

"People must think first before they act. They are not animals. If we are loyal like the feudal system in the past, where we are obediently loyal to the sultans, even when they gave lands away to the colonial masters, then we would bear the consequences as history has shown," he said.

"There is a time for loyalty. It if brings benefit, and unity, then be loyal," he added.

Mahathir also commented that he was constantly misconstrued while he was in power: "The press, they like to buat cerita ringkas."

"Mereka kata, Mahathir tangkap Anwar dan buang dia dalam penjara," he said, while gesticulating the act.

"Mana ada? They spoke as if I literally went down to catch him and throw him into jail. There were procedures, the police and the conviction through the courts, that were followed. Things were done according to the rules, at least back then," he said.

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