

Dr Mahathir : vote for him and you'll destroy Umno
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Former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad called on Umno members today to muster enough courage to 'cut off' the diseased part of the party before the malignant sickness spreads and leads to the demise of the party. MCPX

Speaking to about 500 Umno members at a hotel in Kuala Lumpur, Mahathir said given that Umno president Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has been less than willing to step down voluntarily, he should be forced to do so.

"The doctor's prescription is to cut the sick leg in order to save the other parts so that the whole body can get better and does not die," he said at the talk organised by the Pusat Bandar Taman Cempaka Umno branch.

"I feel that if nothing happens, if surgery is not done and we do not discard the gangrenous part, Umno will not be brought back to its former health," argued Mahathir, who is a trained medical doctor.

Mahathir said Abdullah's follies have culminated in the ruling coalition's unprecedented setback in the March 8 general election, where even Barisan Nasional sympathisers voted either for the opposition or spoiled their ballots.

According to the former premier, Abdullah has taken it for granted that he has support from the party given the general unwillingness of those around him to "tell him the truth".

"I am sure that if we do not do anything and let things go as they are, if we continue to rush to kiss such leaders' hands and express our support for them... (and) when we do try to rehabilitate Umno, it would be impossible to do so," he said.

The key to this 'movement' to rehabilitate Umno is for Umno's branch and division leaders to "stick out their necks" and tell Abdullah that it is time for him to resign, said Mahathir.

"If we hope that these people (Abdullah and his supporters) will rehabilitate (the party), it will not happen. The only ones who can solve the problems (facing the party) are those brave enough to do so.

"There are still many Umno members who are not courageous enough to stick their necks out," he lamented.

"If only one person did it, (then) that person may be put under the ISA (Internal Security Act). But if it was 1,000 or 100,000 people, there would be no space to detain them all."

Supreme council all 'yes men'

Mahathir spoke for about one hour before taking about another hour to answer questions from the floor.

Asked what concrete steps can be taken to follow through his call for leadership change,

Mahathir said it was crucial for Umno members to raise and discuss the issues "whenever and wherever the opportunities arise".

Another step is for division and branch members to elect delegates to the party's annual general meeting in December those leaders who will voice the grievances of the grassroots, said Mahathir.

"Or else the (party's) supreme council members can decide to convene an extraordinary general meeting, but I am less than confident (of this because) the supreme council is made up of 'yes men'," he said.

When asked whether he still backs Umno's deputy president and Deputy Prime Minister Najib Razak to replace Abdullah, Mahathir reiterated that there was no hurry to name Abdullah's successor.

"I feel that if we succeed (in changing the party leadership), there will no lack of candidates to replace people," he said.

"I have said before that Abdullah's replacement is Najib, but I have also said in a previous gathering that it is better to wait and see whether there are other people with the potential," he added.

Asked to comment on criticisms by Abdullah today about Mahathir's own role in the erosion of judicial independence and press freedom, the former strongman told the audience that Abdullah was merely seeking to point out other people's faults while ignoring his own.

"Vote for this person (in the AGM) and you will destroy Umno."

At the press conference held shortly after his talk, Mahathir said PKR's claim it had convinced 30 BN MPs to defect to the Pakatan Rakyat opposition coalition does not necessary mean its de facto leader, Anwar Ibrahim, would come to power.

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