

Mahathir's return 'good for Umno'
Malaysiakini.com
Sept 12, 2008
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Youth chief Hishammuddin Hussein said today he would welcome former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad back to Umno as it could help the bitterly-divided party to close ranks.

Admitting that Umno is currently "going through hard times", Hishammuddin dismissed allegations by opposition that Mahathir, a former Umno president, would weaken the party.

gerakan youth agm 2007 051007 hishammuddin talk"Of course the opposition would say that. It is anticipated that they would say something like that. If I am the opposition, would I say Mahathir rejoining Umno would strengthen the party? Of course not," Hishammuddin told a press conference.

PAS spiritual leader Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat yesterday said Mahathir's return to Umno would lead to 'chaos' in the party, which is the backbone of the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition.

The 82-year old Mahathir had quit Umno in May after leading the party for 22 years, after falling out with his handpicked successor, Prime Minister and Umno president Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Although Mahathir has said he would return only if there is a change in leadership, Umno vice president Muhyiddin Yassin told reporters this week that Mahathir had decided to come back.

"He as a member of Umno has the right to personally voice his opinion (on who he believes should be the candidate for the party top post) but I don't think the difference of opinion will destroy the party," Hishammuddin said.

Unity all important

The Umno youth chief also called on party leaders and members to unite and improve their relations with other component parties in the BN.

"There is a realisation by party members to close ranks and what is most important is if the issues of politicising religion or playing up racial politics is not curbed, it would lead to disruption of harmony between the races," said Hishammuddin.

Hishammuddin, also the education minister, was also asked if it was true that pressure was escalating for Abdullah to step down.

"I don't know if there is pressure for Abdullah to step down. This is all speculation and it is normal.

"It is also normal for certain Umno leaders to make such speculations but whatever it is, it is the grassroots that will decide," Hishammuddin said.