

Dr Mahathir no show at AGM
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Former Umno president Dr Mahathir Mohamad has decided not to attend the Umno general assembly today.

This snub came after the former premier had apparently agreed to attend as an observer.

On Wednesday, Umno secretary general Tengku Adnan Mansor had said that Mahathir had accepted the invitation and would be attending.

The delegates as well as other party watchers were eagerly waiting for the arrival of the party's former strongman, whose influence still runs high in the party.

It could not be immediately ascertained why Mahathir had decided to skip the meeting once again.

His aide Sufi Yusoff was reported as saying that the former prime minister decided not to attend the morning meeting but did not give any reasons.

Mahathir had quit the party last May, complaining on the manner party president Abdullah Ahmad Badawi was running the Malay-based party.

He vowed never to return as long as Abdullah was still the president. In any event, Mahathir has not attended any of the party's annual meetings since he stepped down in 2003.

His latest decision to skip the meeting after accepting the invitation to attend as an observer could be due to his son Mukhriz's defeat in the Umno Youth chief post yesterday, especially to Khairy.

Mahathir had been Khairy's harshest critic.

Even if Mahathir had attended the meeting today, he would have been forced to listen to his successor Abdullah's speech which warned the party against reverting to the old style of Mahathirism.

Abdullah said that there were some in the party who believed that Umno will regain its glory if it reverts to the old ways by restricting freedom of the citizens and by silencing their criticisms.

The outgoing party president said this would only hasten the party's demise. He will be replaced by Najib Abdul Razak, a man largely seen as a Mahathir loyalist.

Mukhriz not giving up

Meanwhile Mahathir's son Mukhriz said that while he may be defeated in the race for the Umno Youth chief post, he was however not ready just yet to give up his fight.

Mukhriz, who was returned third in the polling yesterday, insisted that he will continue playing his part to implement changes in the ruling party.

"I will continue to contribute although I no longer hold any post in the party," said the former Youth exco member.

He was an early favourite to win the contest for the top post in the Youth wing but somehow found himself to trailing behind Khairy and Mohd Khir Toyo when the results were announced.

Khairy won the contest by pulling in 304 votes while Khir garnered 254, as opposed to Mukhriz's 232.

While Mukhriz showed a great deal of magnanimity by embracing and congratulating Khairy after the results was announced, his supporters however were disappointed.

Some 200 of them held an impromptu rally at about 11.30pm outside the Putra World Trade Centre to protest against the election results.

"Khairy, rasuah (corruption)," they shouted, venting their frustration. Things got heated when a group of Khairy's supporters started taunting the first group.

The police had to interfere to disperse the two groups.

Will remain a critic

Mukhriz, speaking to Bernama today, said that he understood the feelings of his supporters.

He also said that the Youth wing should be sincere in instituting changes.

Mukhriz further added that he would continue to be vocal in criticising the party if the new leadership under Najib was doing something wrong.

"Of course, I will," he said.

"I won't keep quiet just because power transition is taking place in the party. Najib knows this; he knows my character.

"I am voicing out for the sake of the party and the people," he said.

Mukhriz also said that he would be giving up his post as the coordinator for the Aman Malaysia non-governmental organisation (NGO) as he is no longer the Umno Youth international relation and NGO bureau chief.