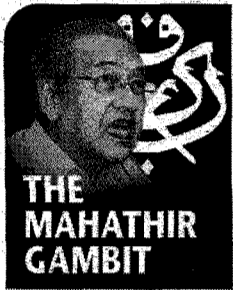


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This is the only way, says Dr Mahathir

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■ By Noor Adzman
Baharuddin &
Adib Povera
news@nst.com.my

ALOR STAR: Former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has quit Umno saying he has totally lost confidence in its leadership.

He made the unexpected announcement in front of about 1,500 people at a forum in response to a dare from one of the participants to lead the way in leaving the party.

Asking other Umno members to follow in his footsteps, Dr Mahathir, 83, said they should not join any other political parties but should rejoin Umno once Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has resigned as party president and prime minister.

"The Malays, Umno members and many other people have sent him messages about their dissatisfaction over his leadership, especially after the March 8 elections, but Abdullah has remained unaffected.

"We have to be radical and brave and this is the only way to bring him down," he said to loud cheers at a talk on "The Future of Malays after the 12th General Election", organised by the Kedah Malay Assembly Hall.

Among those present were assembly chairman Tan Sri Khalid Abdullah, Jerlun Umno division chief Datuk Abdul Rahman Ariffin, Kuala Nerang state assemblyman Datuk Syed Sobri Syed Syed Hashim, Sungai Tiang state assemblyman Suraya Yaacob and former Kedah menteri besar Tan Sri Sanusi Junid.

Dr Mahathir, an Umno life member, announced his decision after someone asked if he would take the lead since he had made the suggestion during his hour-long talk earlier.

A member from the floor, who had identified himself as Ismail Jaziz, had asked Dr Mahathir if he would take the lead since he had mooted the idea about members resigning.

To this, Dr Mahathir, in a se-



Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the Kedah Malay Assembly Hall meeting in Alor Star yesterday.

rious tone, said: "Waa, saya di cabar ni... (I have been dared). Yes, I will leave Umno... until the party leadership is determined. Other Umno members should follow me."

Later, at a press conference, Dr Mahathir said he would write to Umno secretary-general Datuk Seri Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor over his decision soon.

Asked if many Umno members would take up his challenge, he said it was up to them to prioritise Abdullah or the party's struggles.

"It is up to them to follow or not, but if they think they should continue supporting Pak Lah and give priority to Datuk Abdullah (Ahmad) Badawi over the party's struggles, it is their right."

He said it was high time for Umno members who loved the party to be bold for the future of the Malays. Such a move would not cause the Malays to lose their political power.

"The Malays would not lose their political power. They want to correct things not because they simply want to leave.

"If they are brave and want to safeguard the party and the Malay struggles, then they must also be brave to take action.

"However, we find that many Umno members can't even attend certain gatherings... division chairmen also cannot attend... what is this?"

Dr Mahathir said when Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah op-

posed him before, former prime minister Tunku Abdul Rahman had thrown in his support for his opponent and that he never stopped any member from campaigning against him.

"Now, we cannot say anything against the prime minister or the party president. This is not Umno," he said.

Asked if Umno state assemblymen and MPs should also quit the party, he said they should if they truly loved the party.

Dr Mahathir reiterated he would only rejoin Umno after Abdullah had resigned his posts.

Asked if his call and decision could be construed as him giving up on the party, he said he would not ask others to follow him if he himself was afraid to do so.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir said quitting the party would not weaken Umno because he himself was expelled from the party for three years from 1969.

"Umno remained strong and it continued to get support from members who were honest in fighting for the race, religion and country then."

He said he was compelled to issue a strong message to the Umno leadership to start listening to members' needs and not heed only suggestions and advice from a small group of powerful people.

He said Abdullah was not suitable to lead the nation be-

cause he was too soft and would give in to Singapore, the United States, Hindraf and the Bar Council.

He said Abdullah had consistently refused to accept the fact that under his leadership, Umno and Barisan Nasional were on the verge of collapse after they lost five states, including the Federal Territory, and failed to recapture Kelantan.

"He is responsible for destroying BN component parties like the MCA, MIC, Gerakan and PPP when they lost miserably in the last elections.

"As a result, the Chinese and Indian communities, which had been ardent supporters of BN, no longer have confidence in the ruling coalition."

Dr Mahathir said the people of Kedah should also do something for being treated unfairly by Abdullah since they did not have any representative in the cabinet.

"We lost Perak, Penang, Selangor and Kelantan but they have representatives in the cabinet, but why is there no one from Kedah?"

Asked if his decision had anything to do with the V.K. Lingam video clip controversy, Dr Mahathir denied it.

"Nope. That is a court matter and I will go to the courts.

"If they make allegations against me, I could also do the same and if I am found guilty, they can put me in jail but if I am not guilty, please don't arrest me."