

Dr M quits Umno



ALOR STAR: Former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad announced yesterday he was quitting Umno with immediate effect, and urged those who shared his views on Umno's leadership to leave as well, but not to join another party.

The 82-year-old Mahathir said he was doing this as he had lost confidence in the party's present leadership for failing to protect the interests and well-being of the Malays.

"I am quitting Umno today," he announced before 1,000 people, many of them Kedah Umno members, here.

The former Umno president said he would only return as an Umno member after Prime Minister and Umno president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi resigned from the posts or was no longer the country's top leader.

"I will write a letter to Umno headquarters to inform that I had quit the party," said Mahathir, who was the prime minister and Umno president for 22 years.

His announcement came three days after the government ordered the attorney-general to investigate him and five others over the appointment of judges while he

was in power. He had said he was willing to be investigated and taken to court over the allegations.

Addressing reporters after a function titled "Fate of the Malay Race", organised by the Kedah Malay Assembly Hall, a visibly-disappointed Mahathir said he decided to leave Umno because he felt the party could no longer serve as a genuine political party to protect Malay rights and interests, Umno's founding objectives.

"I will not ask people to do something that I myself dare not do."

- Mahathir inviting Umno members to leave the party but not to join another party.

Expressing his dissatisfaction, Mahathir, who has been an Umno member since the party's formative year in 1946, claimed Umno had now been made a party to merely recognise Abdullah as the Umno president and accord importance to the prime minister's family interests, with the nation's welfare taking a backseat.

"I can list out the things that Abdullah

had done to the detriment of our nation's interests. The Umno of today no longer holds to the party's founding goals when it was formed 62 years ago. That is why I have no hesitation whatsoever to leave the party," said Mahathir, who was expelled from Umno in 1969 for breaching party discipline when he criticised the then party leadership led by Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj. He was readmitted into Umno in 1972.

Mahathir invited Umno members, who shared his stand on the current Umno leadership, to leave the party but not to join another party.

"I believe this way will be effective. I will not ask people to do something that I myself dare not do," he said.

He also reiterated his disappointment over Umno members being prevented by the party leadership from meeting him. "Even to meet them, Umno members and division leaders are not allowed to see me. What is this?" he asked.

He said the Umno leadership's action had only created more dissatisfaction and had portrayed Umno as undemocratic.

» Turn to Page 2

Dr M reiterates Pak Lah must go

» From **Front Page**

Asked whether his resignation would prompt Umno members to follow suit, Mahathir said: "I don't care as I was prevented from meeting party members."

He said he believed his move to leave Umno would not have an impact on the politics of the Malays.

"I was once thrown out of Umno and the Malay politics did not fade away. If the Malays want to correct the situation, it's not because of my quitting. If they are brave to save the party and the party's struggles, they must be brave to act," he said.

Mahathir reiterated that Abdullah must relinquish his prime minister's post to ensure Umno's survival and, if necessary, Umno members can pass a vote of no-confidence to force Abdullah to step down, Bernama reported.

Asked whether his latest move to quit Umno was to apply pressure on Abdullah, Mahathir said: "I don't know about pressure because this man doesn't seem to understand anything."

Reuters reports that if Umno MPs quit the party and declare themselves independents, meaning no party commands a clear majority in parliament, it will send Malaysia into the political wilderness. Umno, backbone of the 14-party BN, that has ruled since 1957, holds 79 of the 140 BN seats.