

**Dr M earns praise from Najib at Umno meet**  
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**By Clara Chooi**

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 1 — Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad earned a special thanks from Datuk Seri Najib Razak tonight as the Umno president praised the country's longest serving prime minister for "voluntarily" campaigning for Umno.

Najib pointed out that Dr Mahathir, despite his advanced years and exit from the forefront of Umno's politics, had traversed the length and breadth of Malaysia to rally up Umno's troops ahead of the coming polls.

"I would like to thank Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad. Why do I mention Tun's name in this assembly?"

"Because even without me telling him to, Dr Mahathir has voluntarily met with all our Umno leaders," Najib said, calling sudden attention to the veteran politician during his closing speech at Umno's 66th general assembly here.

Dr Mahathir (picture), who was sitting slumped in his seat inside Dewan Merdeka, was a picture of surprise at the mention of his name.

When applause spread across the hall and delegates rose to give the former prime minister a standing ovation, Dr Mahathir smiled, tried to wave the crowd down, before getting to his feet to acknowledge the praise.

Najib said that during Dr Mahathir's meeting with Umno members, the latter would send a crucial message that unity was the most important to ensure the party's survival.

He said Dr Mahathir would tell members not to support the individual but to support the party, adding that even if a person disagreed with certain policies, it is most important to ensure that the struggle continues.

"Because he says that if a party is still in power, the struggle could still go on. Thank you, Tun," Najib said.

He later accorded the same acknowledgement to his predecessor Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, saying the former prime minister has shown "continuous support" for his leadership.

Najib praised Abdullah for graciously stepping down as prime minister after BN's poor electoral showing in 2008, saying that this was in line with Umno's tradition.

"Finally, when he handed over the post of PM to me, he said - Najib, I want to see better than what I did. Thank you very much," he told Abdullah, who was also urged to his feet.

In Election 2008, BN lost its traditional two-thirds parliamentary majority and ceded five states to parties that eventually formed the Pakatan Rakyat (PR) opposition pact. It later regained control of Perak following a series of defections.

Soon after the general election, former prime minister Tun Abdullah Badawi had singled out predecessor Dr Mahathir as among those who helped undermine BN by campaigning against the ruling coalition.

Dr Mahathir also left the party before the 2008 elections and only rejoined when Najib took over in 2009.

Unlike in 2008, however, Dr Mahathir appears now to be firmly in Najib's camp as the latter prepares to lead BN for the first time in elections expected within months.

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