

**Dr Mahathir's Presence At Upcoming Umno General Assembly Meaningful - Reezal Merican Bernama**  
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KEPALA BATAS, Nov 29 (Bernama) -- The willingness of former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad to attend the UMNO General Assembly 2015 early next month will be very meaningful to the gathering, especially to party unity.

Penang UMNO Liaison Committee deputy chief, Datuk Seri Reezal Merican Naina Merican said the invitation which UMNO extended to Dr Mahathir was apt as he was the president of the party for 22 years.

"It is strange if Dr Mahathir is not invited, and former UMNO president Tun Abdullah (Ahmad Badawi) too because they are both former presidents who are still alive.

"We have good manners, morals and culture of our own and it has been a tradition in UMNO that we also honour our past leaders. I believe his (Dr Mahathir) presence will be very meaningful to the assembly," he told reporters after handing over business equipment aid worth RM200,000 under the Kepala Batas parliamentary constituency 1Azam Programme, here, today.

He was asked to comment on the invitation to Dr Mahathir by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi for the opening of the UMNO General Assembly on Dec 10.

Ahmad Zahid, who is also an UMNO vice-president, had said that the party respected Dr Mahathir as a former president and national leader and hoped he could attend the assembly.

Dr Mahathir was today reported as willing to attend the upcoming UMNO General Assembly if he was invited and said that UMNO belonged to all registered members and anybody had the right to attend the annual event.

Reezal Merican, who is also Deputy Foreign Minister, said despite the differences of opinion between Dr Mahathir and the current leader, it was not an obstacle to members staying united.

He also said that a difference of opinion was not only accepted by the current leadership and, in fact, UMNO president Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak always accepted it with an open heart.

"Najib, who is also prime minister, is among the UMNO presidents who often receives criticism but he is open to this and it should be understood that differences of opinion should not harm party unity.

"UMNO unity has been strongly upheld for years and let us not destroy it only due to differences of opinion. Party members must also be strong and continue to support UMNO," he said.

Reezal Merican said it was currently crucial that UMNO be guided by a president who could take the party towards victory in the 14th General Election.

"The task is not on the shoulders of the party president alone. On the other hand, all leaders and party members must play their role by carrying out their duties well in their respective areas," he said.

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