

Umno united behind Abdullah

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KUALA LUMPUR: Umno yesterday reaffirmed its unity despite the recent statements and criticism made by former premier Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad against the country's leadership for several major decisions it had made.

The party's supreme council, which met here yesterday, unanimously brushed off any talk of factionalism within its ranks.

It is also learnt that no discussions were held on Mahathir's membership in the party, despite this having been discussed in recent new reports.

The meeting was chaired by party president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who was the target of Mahathir's ire in his quest for answers to his questions

on major issues of the day.

After the meeting, Abdullah told newsmen the first thing discussed was Mahathir's statements. He then handed over the press conference to his deputy Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak to continue.

Najib said the supreme council unanimously pledged their support to Abdullah's leadership as prime minister and Umno president.

"This is the stand made by all Umno leaders, both at the national and state level. No leader has said he does not support the leadership of Datuk Seri Abdullah."

He also said there are no "factions in Umno" as a result of Mahathir's verbal attacks.

Early this month, Mahathir publicly accused Abdullah of reneging on his promises made to the former before he took over the leadership to continue certain

projects and policies.

Mahathir is unhappy with the present government's decisions on issues like Approved Permits (AP), the sale of MV Agusta for one euro by Proton, the removal of Tengku Mahaeel as Proton CEO and the recent decision to scrap the construction of the new bridge to replace the causeway in Johor.

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- Najib

Najib said Umno's pledge to support Abdullah unanimously was made after taking into consideration three factors.

» The huge mandate given by

the people to Abdullah during the 2004 general election. The trust given by the people should be fulfilled sincerely.

» The country needs the leadership of Abdullah to see through the smooth implementation of the 9th Malaysia Plan

» Commitment to making Vision 2020 a reality and it will require political unity among the people to achieve this.

The supreme council, Najib said, also made a stand that the government has the right to make decisions or policies based on the current situation and all decisions are made in the best interest of the people.

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properly and politely."

When questions were posed to Abdullah if there were factions in Umno following Mahathir's statement, he said: "No ... Najib has already given the answer."

On whether the supreme council was planning to meet Mahathir, he said no such decision was made.

When asked what will the supreme council do if Mahathir is still unhappy with the explanations given by the government on the questions he raised, Abdullah said: "We will leave it as it is and continue to give our best explanations to him."

There were talks that Mahathir might be sacked from Umno, after PAS vice-president told party organ *Harakah* that he expected Umno to act against the former premier for his criticism against the premier.

The Sun - 20/6/2006



Abdullah is greeted by Shahrir as he arrives for the Umno Supreme Council meeting.

What Supreme Council members say

» Datuk Shahrir Samad: The issue of sacking Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad did not arise in the meeting and if such a decision was made, it would only be more damaging to everyone.

"The issue at hand and the decision by the government to give a full explanation on the questions raised by Mahathir is not about making him happy but it is an explanation for the people as well."

On the issue of factionalism, Shahrir said there was speculation on the ground that there was a crisis in the party following Mahathir's statement.

He said this was done by a certain group of people and the supreme council unanimously decided to end such speculation.

» Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, on whether she was going to explain again the Approved Permit issue which Mahathir is still not happy with, said enough explanation had been given, including in Parliament.

"There is nothing to add to the AP issue and all explanation had been given and I have written to him. If they still want it ... we will just add to what we have given."

» Datuk Zahid Hamidi: "Tun Dr Mahathir advised me last time ... don't throw stones in a glass house... but today, he is not only throwing stones ... but huge rocks."

» Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin: Party leaders have been told to explain to the grassroots on what is happening in the political front, including to clear doubts and the decision made by the supreme council. "The topic on Tun Dr Mahathir's membership did not arise at the meeting."