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MB quits on health grounds (HL)

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PUTRAJAYA, Thurs. - Datuk Seri Abu Hassan Omar today officially announced his decision to step down as Selangor Menteri Besar, citing health reasons and the need to devote more time to his family.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who accepted the resignation, said it was to avoid all kinds of allegations and slander.

"I have discussed the matter with the State Umno and explained to them the situation and all agreed that the resignation should come now for if not there will be all kinds of allegations and slander," Dr Mahathir told Bernama and journalists from television stations after a two and a half hour meeting with senior Information Department officers here.

Before that, the Prime Minister met a delegation from Selangor Umno led by its Deputy Liaison Committee Chief Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib.

Others in the delegation were Selangor State Speaker Datuk Seri Onn Ismail, state excos, heads of state Umno divisions and its Pemuda and Wanita chiefs.

The Prime Minister was responding to questions as to whether he would persuade Abu Hassan to reconsider his decision to step down as some groups wanted him to remain at his post.

News about Abu Hassan's resignation intensified late into the night yesterday triggered by a large gathering of BN Assemblymen and supporters at the Menteri Besar's official residence at Section 7 in Shah Alam, who sought confirmation.

Several of the BN assemblymen later confirmed the resignation.

Dr Mahathir said Selangor Umno would submit names of candidates to succeed Abu Hassan as Menteri Besar.

"Umno will submit the names to me and I will select from among them or from some other names who I think will be suitable."

The Prime Minister said the decision to submit the list of names was made by Selangor Umno itself.

Earlier, the Prime Minister's Office in a three-page statement issued this morning said Abu Hassan's resignation took effect today. The statement said Abu Hassan resigned due to personal reasons.

"He (Abu Hassan) handed over his resignation letter to the Prime Minister yesterday.

"His resignation takes effect today. His successor will be named later," the statement said.

Abu Hassan, 60, was sworn in as Menteri Besar on June 6, 1997 succeeding Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib.

Speculation about Abu Hassan resigning had been rife over the past few days.

Abu Hassan said he would still retain his post as the Permatang State Assemblyman and Kuala Selangor Umno division chief.

At a Press conference at the Selangor Menteri Besar's official residence in Bukit Megawati in Shah Alam, Abu Hassan said he decided to resign due to health reasons and to spend more time with his family.

Reading from a four-page prepared statement, he said: "I will be 60 years old on Sept 15.

"I feel my job as Menteri Besar is taking a heavy toll on me.

"I have to look after my health and also need to spend more time with my wife, children, grandchildren and family members...therefore, I feel I should resign soonest."

He said the fact that he underwent a heart bypass surgery in 1994 was another factor as to why he needed to rest.

He added he had been active in politics for 22 years and had served responsibly in a number of positions in the Federal Government.

Prior to that, he was an officer in the administrative and diplomatic service for 15 years.

He said he had contributed a greater part of his life towards serving the Government, religion, race and nation.

"Thus, it's time I withdraw myself to give full attention towards my family which has made a lot of sacrifices for my success."

Abu Hassan said he was stepping down after putting in place everything to ensure Selangor's continued development.

Among these were the formulation of the "Tonggak 10" as a guideline for the development of the state in efforts towards achieving developed status by the year 2005.

"I have, among others, been successful in ensuring that the agriculture sector played an important role in contributing towards the state's economic growth, bringing about sustained development, increased educational opportunities, better affordable housing and many more development projects in line with the priorities of the Federal Government."

In thanking God Almighty, Abu Hassan said the State Government had achieved an economic growth of 13.8 per cent in the first quarter of the year.

He recorded his highest appreciation to the Prime Minister for placing his trust in him for the last 22 years when he had served as parliamentary secretary, Federal Cabinet Minister and Menteri Besar.

It could not yet be immediately established as to why Abu Hassan resigned.

However, several Opposition assemblymen had questioned his credibility at the state assembly sitting on Monday.

Meanwhile, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said Abu Hassan himself chose to resign after his meeting with the Prime Minister.

He said Abu Hassan went to see Dr Mahathir to express his desire to leave office and was not summoned to Putrajaya by the Prime Minister.

Abu Hassan had met the Prime Minister yesterday and handed his resignation letter.

In a related development, Onn said: "We told the Prime Minister that we would support whatever decision he made wholeheartedly."

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