

Jolt from PM



**UMNO
GENERAL
ASSEMBLY
2002**

Dr M announces resignation but retracts decision later

STAR 2 JUN 2002

KUALA LUMPUR: At 5.56pm yesterday, the nation was sent into shock when Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad announced his resignation from all Umno and Barisan Nasional posts.

The announcement came out of the blue as he was winding up matters raised during debate at the 56th Umno general assembly.

No one, not even his close aides, had any inkling that he had any intention to quit.

However, the Umno president and Barisan chairman later bowed to pressure and appeals from the party and members and agreed to stay on.

The Umno supreme council that convened an emergency

meeting chaired by deputy president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi announced that Dr Mahathir would be going on leave for a few days.

Dr Mahathir's stunning announcement came right after he had been talking about Malaysia's success, more than an hour into his winding-up address.

Without any indication whatsoever, Dr Mahathir who had been at Umno's helm for 21 years, paused, took a sip of water and said:

"I would like to take this opportunity to make an announcement. I would like to announce that I am resigning as Umno president and all my posts in the

party and as Barisan Nasional chairman and all other posts in Barisan Nasional..."

By then he was too overcome by emotion and had to pause to take another sip of water.

Before he could even finish his stunning announcement,

■ Turn to Page Two

Long time to convince PM

■ From Page One

Abdullah rushed to another microphone and interrupted him.

"Mr Permanent chairman, Mr Permanent chairman, we want him (Dr Mahathir) to retract his resignations. We want him to reconsider," he shouted.

Almost at the same time, Wanita Umno chief Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz and Umno Youth head Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein rushed to Dr Mahathir's side.

Rafidah was heard saying: "No, no ... Why, Why?"

By then, they were joined by other supreme council members, many of them pleading with him.

Dr Mahathir, his voice choking, said: "No, no. I have decided. I have decided. *Dah lama dah.* (For a long time)

Rafidah then pushed the microphones on the podium away, to shut out their exchanges. The proceedings were being aired live over RTM.

The thousands of Umno delegates, stunned and disbelieving had difficulty digesting Dr Mahathir's announcement but then broke into uproar.

Shouts were heard from the floor urging Dr Mahathir to reconsider, that they were not ready for him to let go of the party's helm.

By then, many of the delegates, both men and women, were weeping openly and shouting "Long live Mahathir!" and "*Tarik balik, tarik balik!*" (retract, retract) Please Datuk Seri, please, please."

Tun Sulaiman Ninam Shah, with 26 years experience as permanent chairman, also seemed overcome by grief and had difficulty maintaining order.

He then announced that the meeting would be adjourned for 10 minutes.

Nobody heeded his orders and Abdullah then moved an emergency motion for the floor to reject Dr Mahathir's resignation.

"Mr Permanent chairman, we want to tell the president that this general assembly rejects his resignations," he said to cheers from the floor.

Sulaiman then told the assembly that he had conveyed their decision to Dr Mahathir and was awaiting his decision.

While Sulaiman was making his announcement, Dr Mahathir left the hall together with Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, several of his aides and council members.

After 10 minutes, Sulaiman announced that Abdullah had asked for more time and the assembly responded with shouts of "We will not leave!"

At 6.55pm, Sulaiman announced that Abdullah was ready to make a statement and told the delegates who remained glued to their seats to keep calm.

Abdullah went up to the rostrum and announced: "The supreme council, specifically leaders of all party wings, appealed to Dr Mahathir to reconsider his decision, to listen to our feelings as clearly heard earlier."

He said the party leaders took a long time to convince Dr Mahathir of the party's decision before he agreed to remain as Umno president and Barisan Nasional chairman.

Abdullah's announcement was greeted with thunderous applause and shouts from the floor.

Sulaiman then called on Religious Advisor to the government Tan Sri Hamid Othman to recite the doa after which he adjourned the meeting.

Umno Youth and Wanita convened their emergency exco meetings immediately after the assembly was adjourned to endorse Dr Mahathir's continued leadership.

While the drama unfolded at the PWTC, shocked Malaysians started calling each other and sending out SMS to find out what was happening.

The Star's telephone lines were busy with incessant calls, including from foreigners, enquiring whether what they had heard was true.