

# Chaos reflects nation's need for Dr M

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SUN 24 JUN 2002

FOR nearly an hour on Saturday, Umno members and probably other Malays and Malaysians in general were reeling after being struck by a thunderbolt - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's shock announcement that he was stepping down from all his party posts.

But for Umno members and many Malays, there is no denying their sense of loss and helplessness.

Mahathir has stood like a colossus over them and dominated their lives for over two decades - even to the extent of fighting their battles for them.

The Malays have taken this man for granted. It never crossed their minds that Mahathir was a mortal, and that he will not be around forever.

Of course, they knew deep inside their hearts that he would one day leave them, but few, if any, expected it to be on that fateful day.

And when the announcement came, they were left momentarily speechless, with many reduced to tears, and prayers for the great leader to change his mind.

Suddenly they felt that they needed him. Even those who were against him, non-partisan Malays, expressed concern.

"He cannot resign now. He must continue. We need him," exclaimed an opposition sympathiser.

It was at about 5.55pm when the Umno president and prime minister dropped the bombshell in a packed Dewan Merdeka at Putra World Trade Centre and to millions of television viewers in the country.

Trying to fight back tears, Mahathir, in a voice choked with emotion, announced his resignation from all post in Umno and Barisan Nasional. Maybe he had more to say, but by then the dam had broken and the practically sobbing PM was engulfed in a sea of Umno leaders desperate for him to change his mind.

If words had not failed him, many wondered what else he may have said. Would he have announced his resignation from the government as well?

In a near chaotic situation, Mahathir was escorted by aides and party leaders to an anteroom where top

Umno leaders, including deputy president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and the three vice-presidents, met and talked to him for nearly 30 minutes.

It was almost an hour later that Abdullah returned to the hall and announced that Mahathir had agreed to retract his resignation. But the assembly hadn't waited for this - they had earlier rejected the resignation.

A few days before the assembly and in his address on the first day of the Umno General Assembly, Mahathir had lamented that he had failed to changed the mindset of the Malays.

Since 1981, when he became the prime minister, he had called on the Malays to emulate the work ethic of the Japanese and Koreans, two nations that had grown into economic giants after surviving the devastation of war.

Then came the *Bersih, Cekap, Amanah* campaign, with a promise to put the fear of God in civil servants to eradicate corruption.

Then he shifted the country's main thrust from agriculture to industry, and was the impetus for the first Malaysian-made cars. He wanted the Malays to participate fully in the country's economic life.

His idea was to make the Malays a respected race; respected for their knowledge, their hardworking attitude, their skills, their honesty; a forward looking race.

He also wanted to unite the various races in the country under one nationality; integrate them into one Malaysian race. He introduced various programmes meant to promote and enhance this plan.

He was a man with a vision and he set a target date. But he noticed the Malays were still slow in pulling themselves up in order to catch up with the rest of the country.

Many reasons were given for this the Malays were greedy, for one, and that they are only interested in getting rich quick.

As it turned out, Mahathir's enemies did not come from other political parties such as PAS, Parti Keadilan Nasional, or the DAP, for instance.

His real enemy was the attitude and the mindset of the Malays. Those who know this will quickly realise that what happened on Saturday was not a drama

or *sandiwara*.

It fits into a scheme of things that only Mahathir knows. The message in his opening speech was clear enough. It seems he was saying "this is what I have done and this what we have achieved and these are our failures. So from now on, somebody should take over."

The theme of last year's speech when opening the Umno assembly was *Melayu Mudah Lupa* or Malays Forget Easily.

But what prompted Mahathir to take such drastic action? What actually broke the camel's back? What made him announce his resignation?

A lot of theories are being thrown about. According to some, Mahathir was disappointed with Umno members who still continue to pursue their personal ambition rather than the party's work.

They said Mahathir was angry that campaigning for the three vice-presidents' posts had started despite the party's election next year being postponed indefinitely.

They said Mahathir was disappointed that instead of implementing government policies, civil servants are still wrapped up in their own selfish pursuits, implementing only things which benefit them.

They said he was disappointed because there are still Malaysians who oppose the integration programme planned, such as the vision schools.

Putting aside all that, the question asked by many on Saturday night was this: will Mahathir carry out his resignation plan or back out?

According to some, judging from Mahathir's actions the past 21 years, he would carry out his plan, with only the timing to be worked out.

"He is a man who will do what he has decided. It's only a matter of time," said an Umno leader who declined to be named.

Meanwhile, Umno members wait with mixed feelings. What happens if it is true? And if going by previous Umno culture, jostling for posts would have started Saturday night itself, subtly.

As far as businessmen are concerned, so long as Mahathir has not personally withdrawn his resignation to the public, the share market is expected to react unfavourably in the next couple of days.