

Drama in Umno gets global coverage

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Prominence given to event

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HONG KONG: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's shocking resignation and subsequent retraction received wide coverage by many major newspapers around the world yesterday.

The *Sunday Morning Post*, the major English daily here, even gave the incident the lead story on its front page and devoted its lead editorial to comment about it.

While describing Dr Mahathir as a global leader in Asia, the newspaper warned in its commentary that his actions might have caused some damage to the Malaysian economy as it would cause uncertainty.

"But whether Dr Mahathir's image has been boosted or harmed by his decisions yesterday (Saturday), Malaysia has not come through unscathed.

"The economic strategies that have served the country well in times of financial uncertainties were backed by stable political rule," the *Post* editorial stated.

China's two major English daily - the *People's Daily* and *China Daily* - also gave prominence to the drama that unfolded at the end of the Umno general assembly. The two newspapers made the story lead stories in their foreign pages.

Taiwan's English newspaper *The China Post* also made the story a page lead.

Dr Mahathir's shock announcement and subsequent persuasion by the Umno supreme council

members to retract his resignation was also given coverage by many other newspapers around the world.

It was also front-paged by Australian newspaper *The Age*, which reported that "the early evening drama has left serious questions about the future of Malaysia's political leadership amid mounting speculation that an early general election will be called within months."

The Australian - headlining the story as Mahathir Drama - even quoted Australian Prime Minister John Howard and Foreign Minister Alexander Downer as saying that they were waiting to hear from diplomatic sources before commenting on it.

In the United States, *The Washington Post* in reporting the story said: "The reaction among supporters demonstrated that many Malaysians cannot imagine another leader. (Dr) Mahathir has transformed Malaysia into one of Asia's richest countries and recently has emerged as a moderate Muslim leader committed to battling terrorism."

The British newspapers concluded that it was just a ploy by Dr Mahathir. *The Observer* reported that "the move appeared little more than a ploy to strengthen his already extremely firm grip on power."

However, all the newspapers agreed that Dr Mahathir's move seemed strange as he was now in a strong position and was again in favour with the West.