

Painstaking succession plan ensures stability

Comment by **Zainal Epi**

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CERTAINTY has been restored and it is business as usual again after the announcement by the Umno Supreme Council that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has agreed to stay on until October next year after announcing his resignation on Saturday.

The announcement cleared the air. It must come as a relief to all Malaysians that Mahathir has planned a smooth transition of power to his successor.

In retrospect, many are saying Saturday evening's show of emotions would not have taken place had Umno Supreme Council members and delegates at the Dewan Merdeka of the PWTC had allowed Mahathir to finish his announcement.

If they waited for just a few more minutes, they would have got the clearer picture of how the transition would take place. They would actually appreciate the pain taken by Mahathir to plan for all this.

Mahathir was probably planning for the assembly to endorse deputy president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi as his successor when he resigns next year.

This way, Abdullah's position will be stronger and the chance of him being challenged would be less. But what he failed to do on Saturday, he achieved through the supreme council statement.

There might not even be a tussle for the deputy president post because by next year Abdullah would have identified his running mate.

In this way, there might also be less campaigning for the three vice-presidents' posts thus, less money politics and speculation. In the meantime, until the day Mahathir leaves, party members would be working hard to ensure all his plans are achieved, if not fully, at the very least partially, as Mahathir may take stock of all

his plans in next year's party assembly.

Under the plan, Mahathir will relinquish all his party and government posts after the Organisation of Islamic Council meeting in October next year.

Abdullah assumes the post of acting prime minister for two months from now until Mahathir resumes his post again and whenever the situation calls for it.

This way, Abdullah will have the opportunity to make his presence felt as he takes on more responsibilities from Mahathir in the day-to-day running of party and government affairs.

Abdullah will also learn to handle party and government responsibilities on his own as Mahathir gradually moves

This is the first time in the country's

history that a clear succession plan has been put in place. Mahathir, being a meticulous and organised man, is the first prime minister that has planned the succession well.

Given the plan as announced, Mahathir will probably still lead the Barisan Nasional in the next general election to ensure the coalition hold more than a two-third majority in parliament.

In short, the general election will probably be held before Mahathir leaves office. But whatever has been planned, the Malays especially are rejoicing and will probably change their mindsets faster as has been urged by Mahathir. After October next year, they are unlikely to have a person such as Mahathir to nag them.