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Dr M to hand over
reins to Pak Lah
after OIC summit

2003

KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will pass the reins of power to his deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi after October next year.

He had decided to go ahead with his plan to retire from all posts in Umno, Barisan Nasional and the government, which he had announced at the close of the Umno general assembly last Saturday, and named Abdullah as his successor.

His resignations will only take effect about 16 months from now, after the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) summit that will be hosted by Malaysia from Oct 24-25 next year to allow for a smooth transition of power.

Between now and October next year, he will take two months' leave during which Abdullah will be appointed acting president of Umno, acting Prime Minister and acting Finance Minister. Abdullah will also be the acting prime minister and finance minister whenever Dr Mahathir goes on leave during that period.

Dr Mahathir's intention to retire was announced by Umno secretary-general Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob after a special meeting of the Umno supreme council at the party headquarters yesterday.

The meeting was convened to receive the report on the outcome of the meeting

between Dr Mahathir and members of the Umno management committee who were given the mandate by the supreme council to meet the Prime Minister at Sri Perdana, Putrajaya, on Sunday morning, prior to his leaving for his overseas holiday.

According to Khalil, during the period until the OIC summit, Dr Mahathir would continue to hold all his posts in the party, Barisan and the government, including the post of Finance Minister.

"Dr Mahathir has explained that the date for his resignations had been decided upon to ensure a smooth and orderly transition of power and responsibilities, and also to fulfil outstanding commitments such as chairing the Non-Aligned Movement summit which will be held on Feb 24-25 next year and the OIC summit.

"He has also informed us that after his resignation from all posts in Umno, Barisan and the government, he will continue to contribute his energy and ideas for the benefit of the party," he said.

He said Dr Mahathir also advised all Umno members to continue to work together for the betterment of the party.

Yesterday's meeting, Khalil said, accepted and respected Dr Mahathir's intention to retire.

"The council also urges

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Khalil: Time to be united in our collective struggle

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party members to respect Dr Mahathir's decision. This is the time for us to be united in our collective struggle for the community, our religion and the nation," he said.

Abdullah later said he was touched by the council members' support and confidence shown him as Dr Mahathir's successor.

"But as of now, Dr Mahathir is still the Prime Minister, Umno president and Barisan chairman. As his deputy, I will continue with my work," he said.

Abdullah said Dr Mahathir had entrusted him with the task of carrying out his duties during his 10-day holiday but he would not be making major

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policy decisions.

"I don't plan on announcing any new policy but will merely work as usual. But if a decision needs to be made, I will make it and will inform Dr Mahathir so that he will always be informed of what is happening in the country," he added.

Asked whether the transition period would result in a "lame-duck prime minister," Abdullah said:

"All this lame-duck thing is only in your mind. The effectiveness of the machinery will not be affected at all and all of us will continue to support his decision and carry on with our responsibilities as if Dr Mahathir is not going to retire.

"This also does not mean that I will try to outshine him or to project myself ahead of

him. That is not my style, nor will I suddenly announce a new policy. That will not happen because Dr Mahathir's presence will always be respected."

Abdullah also brushed aside questions about the next general election and the impending party election next year.

He said the two issues were not discussed in the meeting with Dr Mahathir, nor were they raised during the council meeting.

Asked if he would be the next Prime Minister after next year, Abdullah said he could not say for sure.

"But when Dr Mahathir retires, as is his wish, I will take over as the Prime Minister," he said.