

Philippines surprised by Dr M's decision

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MANILA, Philippines
President Gloria Arroyo was "surprised" by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's decision to step down next year, but the succession should not lead to regional instability, a presidential spokesman said yesterday.

"As regards the continuity of leadership in Malaysia, we have no doubt that Malaysia is a very stable nation so that its stability and that of its relationship with Asean is not affected," Arroyo spokesman Silvestre Afable said.

Kuala Lumpur and Manila are founding members of Asean, which includes Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

Afable noted that Arroyo "has a very close working relationship with Dr Mahathir."

"He has been very helpful in the peace process in Mindanao and we are surprised by his decision."

Dr Mahathir has played host to peace talks between the Manila government and Moro Muslim separatist rebels in the southern Philippines. — AFP