

No squabbling over DPM post, says Mahathir

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PETALING JAYA: There will be no squabbling over the post of deputy prime minister and Umno deputy president when Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi takes over the party and the leadership of the country, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

The Prime Minister and Umno president said an agreement was reached during a meeting he had with the party's leaders shortly before he went overseas on June 23.

"At the meeting, we agreed with a programme to change the leader (Dr Mahathir). I fully supported the appointment of Datuk (Seri) Abdullah Badawi as my successor.

"The other Umno leaders also agreed that there should not be any squabbling for the post of deputy prime minister and deputy president of the party," he told a crowd of about 5,000 who had gathered at the Royal Malaysian Air Force base in Subang here to welcome him.

He said his wishes had

been conveyed to Barisan component party leaders through Abdullah.

Dr Mahathir said that giving up the posts would allow him more time to meet the *rakyat*.

"I hope to meet as many as possible (Umno) party members, (Barisan) component party members and the *rakyat* to explain the importance of continuing with the good ways which we practice in Malaysia," he said.

He said the 10-day trip abroad had given him the chance to think about his decision to retire as Umno president and prime minister next year.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir said the staunch support of the people had ensured that the transition proceeded smoothly.

"This strong support has allowed us to administer the country when there is peace, calm, during a crisis or when there is a change of leaders," he said.

He said he was grateful for the support because, normally, when there was a

change of leadership, there would be chaos and power struggle.

Dr Mahathir, who has been Prime Minister for 21 years, said the country could achieve developed status by 2020.

"Some territories (states) will even achieve developed status earlier. If there is no conflict among us and the strong support for the Government continues, the *rakyat* will soon enjoy the benefits of a developed country," he said.

■ Edited transcript of PM's press conference - P18