

He's still the boss

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PETALING JAYA: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad intimated shortly after returning from a 10-day vacation yesterday that he is very much in charge but said he would play no further role in government after stepping down in October next year.

He said he fully supports Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi as his successor and is confident that he would receive the support of Umno leaders and those of other Barisan Nasional parties.

"I have always said that when I leave, I leave completely. I am not going to hold any position in the party or government," a relaxed and smiling Mahathir told a packed press conference shortly after addressing thousands of well-wishers who greeted him at the Subang RMAF base.

Mahathir said during the 16-month transition period, he would ensure that all government policies remain in place and that there would be no power struggle within Umno.

Asked whether he would stand for parliament in the next general election, he said he would think about it when the time comes but whatever his decision he would continue to work to ensure that the government and the party enjoy strong support.

He added that he would have said all that at the close of the Umno general assembly on June 22 had he not been interrupted and he would have also said he was quitting immediately from the party, BN and the government.

Mahathir said whenever he had told leaders and friends about his intention to quit, "all those I spoke to wanted me to continue, if I could, till the end of my lifetime".

So he decided "to make an open statement at the assembly" without warning anybody. But after the pandemonium he caused, he agreed to stay on for a month. The next day he

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gave in to Umno leaders' pleas and changed that to after the Organisation of Islamic Conference summit in October next year.

On why he had to resign when the country is doing well, he said: "My mother taught me when you are enjoying a real good meal, stop when the food is still good. So I guess it's good for me to stop now."

Asked why he was so emotional when announcing his resignation, he said:

"Parting is always a sad thing. Being associated for three-quarters of my lifetime with the party, of course I felt rather sad that I would have to make this decision. Also I'm getting old, people get emotional."