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Mahathir-Relinquish

DR MAHATHIR TO CONTINUE HEADING THE GOVT AND UMNO UNTIL OCTOBER 2003

KUALA LUMPUR, June 25 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will relinquish his post as prime minister after October next year and has confirmed Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi as his successor.

Dr Mahathir announced his resignations as Umno president and Barisan Nasional chairman at the Umno general assembly last Saturday but later agreed to continue to helm the government and party to ensure a smooth and orderly transition of power for his deputy.

Umno secretary-general Agung Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob announced this after a special meeting of the Umno supreme council, here, today.

In the supreme council statement that he read out, Khalil said the special meeting accepted Dr Mahathir's resignations and Abdullah would take over from Dr Mahathir after the prime minister chaired the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) Summit on Oct 24 and 25, 2003.

The special meeting was held to discuss the report of the Umno Management Committee which met Dr Mahathir at Seri Perdana on Sunday morning.

The committee was given the mandate by the supreme council at its meeting on Saturday night to discuss a compromise formula to ask Dr Mahathir to continue to lead Umno and the government during the transitional period.

Dr Mahathir shocked the nation when he announced his decision last Saturday to relinquish his posts after 21 years. He retracted his decision after it was rejected by the Umno supreme council members and delegates who wanted him to continue leading the government and party.

Dr Mahathir is on a one-week vacation in Italy and is expected to return home on July 3.

Khalil said that during the period until the OIC Summit, Dr Mahathir would continue to hold all his posts in Umno, Barisan Nasional and the government, including the post of Finance Minister.

"In the period until the said OIC Summit, Dr Mahathir will take a leave of two months during which Abdullah will be appointed as acting Umno president and acting prime minister," he said.

Answering questions from reporters later, Abdullah said Dr Mahathir would take the two months' leave between now and the OIC Summit.

The special supreme council announcement was telecast live by RTM and TV3.

Khalil also said that Abdullah would be the acting Umno president and acting prime minister on any other occasion that Dr Mahathir would be on leave.

He said Dr Mahathir had explained that the date for his resignations was decided upon to ensure a smooth and orderly transition of power and responsibilities.

It was also to fulfil outstanding commitments such as the chairing of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit which would be held on Feb 24 and 25 next year and the OIC Summit.

Dr Mahathir had also stated that after his resignations from all posts in Umno, BN and the government, he would continue to contribute his energy and ideas for the benefit of Umno.

The supreme council, in the two-page statement, said that Dr Mahathir Mohamad wanted all Umno members to continue to work together and strengthen the party to ensure Umno's success in its struggle.

The supreme council respected and accepted Dr Mahathir's intentions and urged the party members to do likewise and unite to strengthen the party in facing the challenges in their struggle for the community, religion and country.

Abdullah told the media conference that all the members of the supreme council and state liaison bodies who had held meetings among themselves before the special meetings supported all the decisions made by Dr Mahathir after hearing the report of the Management Committee.

"This means that the support is 100 per cent, any assumption of a split in the supreme council does not arise," he said.

He also said that Dr Mahathir, as a leader who had thought out the matter carefully, had made provision for an orderly transition of power.

"I'm very moved by the support of the supreme council for the prime minister's wishes," he said.

Abdullah said he believed that the party unity would continue to be strong and the spirit of unity and consensus shown by the party members, especially the supreme council members, would overcome whatever problem.

"If anyone makes the assumption that after the prime minister (Dr Mahathir) is no longer here, we will be in chaos, I don't think that's going to happen with the spirit shown at the meeting just now," he said.

The deputy prime minister said he would carry out his duties as acting prime minister to the best of his ability when Dr Mahathir goes on leave.

"I will do my work well and with loyalty without causing him any doubt," he said.

Abdullah said he would keep Dr Mahathir informed of any decision he made because two months was a long time and he (Dr Mahathir) should know what was going on in the country and government.

Asked whether he would also act as the finance minister when Dr Mahathir goes on leave, he said: "All this while that's been the case. When he leaves the country, matters relating to the Finance Ministry are my responsibility," he said.

Asked whether the meeting discussed the party elections next year, he said it did not arise.

"What was discussed today pertained to the prime minister's intention (to resign)," he said.

Meanwhile, Umno Youth leader Datuk Hishammuddin Tun Hussein said he would ensure the movement's undivided support during the transitional period.

Umno Youth would continue to work as a united force to achieve the party's struggle, he said.

Hishammuddin conveyed the movement's appreciation for Dr Mahathir's contributions and his willingness to stay on to ensure an orderly transition of power.

-- BERNAMA

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