

22 JUN 2002

Mahathir-Resignation

DR MAHATHIR ANNOUNCES RESIGNATION FROM UMNO AND BN

KUALA LUMPUR, June 22 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad agreed to continue to lead Umno an hour after he announced his decision to resign from the post of party president today.

The Prime Minister announced his resignation from the post in his winding up speech at the final day of the 56th Umno General Assembly at the Putra World Trade Centre here.

Soon after his announcement, Umno Supreme Council members led by deputy president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi rushed to his side to persuade Dr Mahathir to withdraw his decision.

Umno permanent chairman Tun Sulaiman Ninam Shah stood down the general assembly for about 45 minutes while attempts were made to persuade Dr Mahathir to remain in his post.

Dr Mahathir's decision to withdraw his resignation was announced by Abdullah at 7pm when Supreme council members succeeded in persuading him to reconsider his decision.

Earlier, Sulaiman announced the adjournment at 6.15pm to calm down the situation at the Merdeka Hall where the general assembly was held while Supreme Council members surrounded Dr Mahathir and delegates were in shock and overcome with emotion following Dr Mahathir's announcement at about 6pm.

Abdullah's announcement was warmly applauded by the delegates, Supreme Council members and observers who had filed into the hall to find out the latest development.

Supreme Council member Tan Sri Dr Abdul Hamid Othman then led the "doa" (prayer) in gratitude for Dr Mahathir's decision to withdraw his resignation.

Delegates then sang the national anthem "Negara Ku" and recited the "selawat" to invoke God's blessings.

Earlier, the Prime Minister shocked the general assembly when he announced his resignation from his party post.

"I would like to take this opportunity to announce my resignation as Umno president and all positions held by me in the party, resigning my post as Barisan Nasional chairman and all posts in the Barisan Nasional," he said, sobbing after taking a sip of water.

Delegates, taken by surprise, called out " "No No No. Withdraw. Withdraw."

Wanita Umno chief Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz and Umno Youth chief Datuk Hishammuddin Tun Hussein, followed by other Supreme Council members including Abdullah rushed to the rostrum to persuade Dr Mahathir to withdraw his decision.

Rafidah was heard asking "Why sir?", while Hishammuddin was heard saying "No. No".

Dr Mahathir responded by saying "I've decided, I've decided...long ago," and shaking his head, trying to control his emotion.

It was an extremely emotional situation and the permanent chairman had to ask those present in the hall to remain calm.

About eight minutes later, Rafidah announced an emergency motion to unanimously reject Dr Mahathir's decision and her move was met with cries of "Agree" from the delegates.

A minute later, Abdullah said: "I seek the unanimous agreement of the delegates for Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir to continue to lead the party."

"Agree," they replied in unison.

Cries of "Withdraw. Withdraw. Long Live Mahathir. Long Live Mahathir," were heard throughout the hall.

Some of the delegates sang the Umno song and they remained standing even though Sulaiman repeatedly called on them to sit down.

Supreme Council members also refused to return to their seats and Sulaiman advised them to calm down to restore the situation before announcing an adjournment.

Dr Mahathir and the Supreme council members then proceeded to a special room.

According to Supreme council member Datuk Aziz Shamsuddin who was in the room, Dr Mahathir was persuaded by Abdullah who told him that all the Umno members wanted him to continue to lead the party.

Dr Mahathir eventually agreed to withdraw his decision.

"If that is so, I agree," Dr Mahathir was quoted by Aziz as saying.

Aziz said that he then called for Dr Mahathir's personal physician on Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali's request, to examine the Prime Minister. He was certified to be well by the doctor.

Asked what else happened in the room, Aziz said that Dr Mahathir who appeared to be very emotional, wanted to calm down in the presence of his wife and children.

"Dr Mahathir did not give any indication that he was going to announce his resignation from the party at the general assembly, not even to his family members," said Aziz who has known Dr Mahathir for 27 years after having served as his political secretary.

Dr Mahathir, who has been at the helm of Umno and the BN for 21 years, in a special interview with the weekly Minggu Malaysia last Sunday, expressed his disappointment over his failure to change the attitude of the Malays even though various efforts had been made.

Aziz said that Dr Mahathir, who declined to re-enter the hall, asked Abdullah to inform the delegates that he was withdrawing his decision.

Dr Mahathir was later seen leaving the PWTC for the family home with Dr Siti Hasmah and family members.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Council held an emergency meeting at the party headquarters tonight, believed to discuss the evening's incident.

Asked whether Dr Mahathir has stated how long more he was prepared to lead Umno, Aziz said, "No. God willing, this will not happen again and what is important is that we have conveyed the appeal by the people to him.

After an adjournment of about 45 minutes, Abdullah re-entered the hall and the permanent chairman requested him to make the announcement.

"I have conveyed to Dr Mahathir that what the people and the delegates want is to give their 100 per cent support and appeal for him to withdraw his decision.

"The Prime Minister agreed that I make the announcement that he will continue to lead us," he said.

He said that the Prime Minister wished to remain with his family at that time.

The general assembly ended with Sulaiman's announcement after the short speech by Abdullah.

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