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Dr M must stay, say unions and business community

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - In a show of solidarity, Malaysians from all walks of life today expressed the hope that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad would continue to lead the nation and the people. Insisting Dr Mahathir's services were still required, they not only urged but even prayed that he would stay a little longer as their mentor and leader.

Leading the plea for Dr Mahathir's return were the one million-odd civil servants, the backbone of his administration.

Cuepacs, the umbrella body of civil servants unions, hoped that the Prime Minister would not leave when the nation was heading towards greater challenges, especially in the advent of globalisation.

"We pray that he will continue to lead and guide us ... The whole world recognises his leadership and capability and he is accepted by everyone, irrespective of race, religion or social standing.

"Internationally, Dr Mahathir is a positive contributor and champion of the workers, his pro-labour stand has won the hearts and minds of the workforce all over the world," Cuepacs president Datuk N. Sivasubramaniam said.

Siva said he would lead a delegation of union leaders to express their support to the Prime Minister when he returns from his holiday.

Malaysian Trades Union Congress president Senator Zainal Rampak, while expressing relief that Dr Mahathir had agreed to continue, said that the Prime Minister himself must reassure a "shocked" nation that he will be around to guide Malaysians into becoming a respected race.

"The entire nation is shocked with Dr Mahathir's decision to retire, and if the Prime Minister holds on to it, it would be the single greatest loss, not only to Malaysians but to all developing nations and the entire developing world.

"When he spoke at the International Labour Organisation forum recently, the world listened to him because he is embraced as a 'voice' of developing nations, the discriminated global workforce and the poor," Zainal stressed.

He said Malaysians, especially the workforce, with the right frame of mind would not want to lose a leader of such calibre and clout in the international arena.

Zainal pointed out that in his years of service, Dr Mahathir, had ensured social justice, a credible economy and a conducive environment for Malaysians to excel in any chosen field.

"Sacrificing popularity, he stood out for the common benefit of all Malaysians ... be it the opposition parties, the IMF, World Bank or the superpowers.

"He had read the poem Perjuangan Yang Belum Selesai ... I wonder why he wants to leave when the struggle is not over yet," the veteran trade unionist asked.

Top officials of the Chinese business community are keen to meet Dr Mahathir to personally convey their wish that he continues to lead the country to greater heights.

Associated Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Malaysia deputy secretary-general, Datuk David Chua, said Malaysians should view what transpired at the Umno General Assembly positively.

"His announcement to resign is rather untimely as the business community as a whole still needs Dr Mahathir's able stewardship since there are

still many unfinished issues in the agenda," Chua said.

Chua said that the Chinese business community was united behind Dr Mahathir as they were grateful for the Prime Minister's efforts in leading the country for the past 21 years.

He highlighted Dr Mahathir's zeal and statesmanship in defending Malaysia's economic independence and steering it away from the full brunt of the 1997 regional financial crisis.

He had done this through unorthodox financial measures, including imposing selective capital controls and pegging the ringgit at RM3.80 to the US dollar despite being chastised by the international market.

The capital controls proved to be crucial for it gave the Malaysian economy breathing space and enabled the introduction of expansionist market policies to stimulate the economy which had somewhat ground to a halt then.

As a result, Malaysia came off better from the crisis compared with some neighbouring countries which despite receiving funds from the International Monetary Fund experienced social chaos and debt.

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