

29/06/2002

It's back to business for all Malaysians, relieved by Dr M's decision

Ahmad A. Talib

THE dust has settled and most Malaysians are now back at work. News that Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has on his own accord agreed to serve the nation until October next year has brought relief to many.

It's not only ordinary Malaysians who are relieved, but his colleagues in Government and party as well. It's partly on this premise that everyone is back at their desk and moving on with the national agenda.

By his unselfish action, the Prime Minister has once again demonstrated his total commitment to the country. Mahathir, the doctor-politician, obviously has the interest of his people and country at heart.

One must also thank his wife, Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, and his children, for not violently objecting to his willingness to continue to be a servant to his people. They deserve the gratitude of the people - such understanding and sacrifices are not common and therefore deserve praise.

But if one were to go deeper and analyse the events over the past few days, one would see an even bigger picture. One can clearly see transparency at work, an openness and genuine sincerity for all to see.

One can even see the exemplary maturity of the Malaysian political system. Giving up one's position while at the top and not having colleagues seize the moment to take over is unique to this country.

The fact that the chief executive of the nation had relinquished his job in full view of the nation may be strange to others but certainly not to us. One does not see a similar situation elsewhere. Many world leaders at the peak of their power and popularity would not "volunteer" to step down and pass the baton. They would most certainly carry on.

In a different national political environment, Dr Mahathir's announcement to withdraw from the political scene would have triggered some of the eager and younger colleagues into seizing the opportunity to encourage him to leave so that they could take over.

Instead, the opposite happened. The next most senior leader, Datuk Seri Abdullah Badawi led the national plea to get Dr Mahathir to continue his work.

Given the Prime Minister's well-known firmness in handling issues, he would not have changed his mind if not for the sea of faces pleading for him to change his mind.

Dr Mahathir appeared overwhelmed by the spontaneous reaction of those in the Dewan Merdeka that Saturday, especially the rank and file Umno members.

It must be said that in the final analysis, Dr Mahathir changed his mind not at the behest of his party and Government colleagues but more due to his own conviction that his "perjuangan belum selesai," (his struggles are far from over).

It must also be recognised that Dr Mahathir showed his sincerity by naming Abdullah as his successor as Prime Minister when he (Dr Mahathir) retires.

His willingness to share his duties with Abdullah (who will be acting Prime Minister whenever Dr Mahathir goes on leave) is proof that he is really preparing his loyal deputy to take on the challenges of chief executive of the nation.

This, among others, is the legacy Dr Mahathir will leave to the nation. Come October next year, it would be the duty of Abdullah to lead the

nation in ensuring that this legacy is promoted, adhered to and enhanced.

* The regular Saturday Notes column has been held over. - Ed

(END)