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Short break before resuming normal duties

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - It will be business as usual for Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

His deputy, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, said Dr Mahathir would be going on a short break until July 3 and would be back to continue leading the nation.

Speaking after chairing an emergency supreme council meeting, Abdullah said there would be no changes to Dr Mahathir's working visit to Thailand from July 5 to 7.

He said after making the shocking announcement, Dr Mahathir was met by Umno leaders who persuaded and pleaded with him for more than an hour to stay on.

"Dr Mahathir agreed, saying he was prepared to meet the needs of the party. With this, he said he would continue with all party and government posts," Abdullah said.

He said this was conveyed to the shocked delegates with permission from the Prime Minister.

"This confirms that his intention to retire as mentioned in his winding-up speech will not take place."

Asked how Dr Mahathir was feeling, Abdullah said the Prime Minister had gone home and was all right.

"He was very emotional as you all saw in the hall earlier. Otherwise, he is fine," he said.

He said the supreme council had called for the emergency meeting to explain the situation to party members and Malaysians alike.

"I have instructed all State Umno liaison committee heads to go back to their respective States and explain to all members the exact situation," Abdullah said.

Asked what prompted Dr Mahathir to make such a decision, Abdullah said the Prime Minister felt 21 years of leading the nation was long enough.

He emphasised that the Prime Minister's decision was not due to any other reason.

"The decision was made by him alone. Even his family members were unaware of it. However, they (family) respect his decision to retire," he said.

Abdullah said according to Dr Mahathir, if he were to consult anyone on his intentions to retire, nobody would have approved and he would never have a chance to step down.

Asked if the president's resignation was against the party constitution, he said anyone was free to state his intentions to resign at anytime.

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