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Mahathir-Successor

MAHATHIR CONFIDENT OF ABDULLAH'S LEADERSHIP, ASKS FOR THE PEOPLE'S SUPPORT

KUALA LUMPUR, July 3 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today expressed confidence that Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, whom he has named as his successor, will bring the country to greater heights.

He said he was also confident that his deputy would receive the full support of the leaders of Umno and the other Barisan Nasional component parties to ensure a smooth transition of power to continue with the national development.

Dr Mahathir, who had announced his intention to retire after the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) Summit in October next year, was also happy that the transition of power could proceed smoothly and that it was accepted by the people.

"Thank God, we must be thankful for the situation in our country because a transition of power in the government would normally be plagued with all sorts of problems, chaos, power struggle and so forth," he said upon his return from a 10-day vacation overseas.

"I believe that our country has huge potential for development and to become a developed country by 2020, or even earlier for some areas," he said at a welcoming ceremony attended by over 10,000 people at the Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) base in Subang, near here.

Dr Mahathir said the Umno leaders, at a meeting with him a day after he announced his retirement, had agreed that there would be no power struggle for the posts of deputy prime minister and deputy Umno president.

He thanked the people for their strong support which had enabled the government to concentrate on nation building.

"A lot still needs to be done to develop this nation," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the people would continue to enjoy development if they continued to live in peace like now.

"This is the hope of all of us and this is also my hope," he said.

Dr Mahathir told a media conference earlier that he would continue to serve as Kubang Pasu MP and to give his support to the party and government.

"I believe in giving strong support to the leadership. I had enjoyed the same strong support and I think it is my duty to provide the same strong support to my successor," he said.

He said he could contribute his service despite being outside the government and in fact would have more time to explain the party's struggle and the government's policies and the administration in the country.

"I hope to meet as many people and component party members as possible to explain the importance of continuing with the good practices in our country.

"I'm happy to note the support from so many young people in the recent (Umno) general assembly. This is the second echelon and I must continue with efforts to build a second echelon so that Umno can be perpetuated," he said.

Asked about the criteria for choosing Abdullah as his successor, Dr Mahathir said Abdullah had been chosen by Umno as its deputy president and the party tradition dictated that the deputy president take over the president's post.

"Secondly, I've worked with Abdullah for so long, and at one time, I asked whether he was ready to take over and he said he was, so there's no

question about it," he said.

Asked whether a 16-month transitional period was too long, he said: "I think it's not a problem. It's 16 months because of the OIC meeting.

"I had given an undertaking to many OIC leaders that I would be welcoming them at the meeting, so it's not nice for me not to fulfil my promise. If my resignation had been accepted that day, I would not be the host," he said.

"When I found out that many people disagreed with my intention and wanted me to stay on, I asked for a month but it was not accepted.

"So, the following day, when the party leaders came to my house, I decided that as my responsibility to be chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the OIC, I would stay on for up to 16 months until after the OIC meeting," he said.

Dr Mahathir also received a pennant with the lyrics of a song, "Khalifah Kita", dedicated to him, from Ilya Qastalanni Haulilah, 15, and Dewi Seri Bayu Nordin Selat, 6, who called themselves representatives of the Malaysian people.

There was a carnival atmosphere at the RMAF base with thousands of people gathered there as early as 6am. They also brought along banners and flags with slogans pledging support to the prime minister.

A small aircraft hovered above with a banner carrying the words "Dr M Kepulangan Mu Dinantikan" (Dr M, your return is eagerly awaited).

-- BERNAMA

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