

23/06/2002

Party leaders and members surprised by sudden turn of events

EMOTIONS ran high yesterday on the last day of the Umno general assembly yesterday when party chief Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad shocked the nation by announcing his resignation as party president and chairman of Barisan Nasional.

Delegates attending the assembly expressed relief when deputy president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi announced that the Prime Minister had agreed to withdraw the resignation.

Abdullah said: "All delegates and supreme council members unanimously rejected Dr Mahathir's decision.

"I hope all Umno and Barisan Nasional component party members will now remain calm. Dr Mahathir is still the Umno president, still the Prime Minister and still the Barisan Nasional chairman."

Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said Dr Mahathir had made enormous contributions, not only to the party but also to the country.

"According to Pak Lah, he has withdrawn his resignation and the public should not worry," said Najib who is also Defence Minister.

Vice-president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said Umno was synonymous with Dr Mahathir and without him, it would be like a boat without captain.

"Dr Mahathir's announcement was untimely.

"Thank God he has withdrawn the resignation and we want him to continue leading the party for a long time to come," he added.

Vice-president Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib said the people should not feel restless as Abdullah had repeatedly assured that Dr Mahathir had withdrawn the resignation.

"We should all show our undivided support to him and his plans to uplift the living standards of Malaysians," Muhammad added.

Wanita Umno chief Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz said the movement fully supports Dr Mahathir.

The movement also pledged that they would help Dr Mahathir realise his dream in ensuring a brighter future for the Malays and the country.

She also advised party members to remain calm and warned others not to politicise the whole episode.

Asked why she ran up to Dr Mahathir as soon as the latter made the announcement, Rafidah said:

"It was a spontaneous act.

"I ran to him and asked 'why, why', after that I forgot what I did.

"I also broke the heels of my shoes when I kneeled down to plead for him not to resign," she added.

She also said that the party would never accept Dr Mahathir's resignation, even if he sent a formal letter.

Umno Youth head Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein said when he and other supreme council members met Dr Mahathir after his announcement, the Prime Minister said it was time for him to leave as Umno was strong now.

"But we have already voiced out our stand on the matter.

"We still want him to continue being the party president."

Puteri Umno chief Azalina Othman Said said: "We were shocked by the announcement but we are grateful with the announcement by Abdullah that Dr Mahathir has withdrawn his resignation."

Umno supreme council member, Datuk Azmi Khalid said everyone wanted him to stay on for as long as he could.

Supreme council member Datuk Abdul Aziz Shamsudin said everyone,

including Dr Mahathir's wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, were shocked with the decision.

"It was like a spur of the moment kind of thing.

"But I noticed at the beginning of his speech that he wanted to make an announcement.

"Maybe he is sincere in wanting to leave as he had in many instances said he wanted to resign and give the position to someone else," said Aziz who is Dr Mahathir's former political secretary.

"We need him to face the next general election.

"All Malaysians need him."

Malacca Umno chief Datuk Seri Mohd Ali Rustam said: "This is a shock treatment for all of us.

"However, we, in Umno are grateful that he has withdrawn his resignation.

"There is a lot of work to be done in Umno.

"Without him, Umno will face difficulties in facing the general election."

Mohd Ali said Malacca Umno pledged its undivided support for the Prime Minister, adding that his leadership was badly needed not only by the Malays but other races as well.

Religious adviser to Prime Minister, Tan Sri Abdul Hamid Othman said: "As far as we, in Umno are concerned, Dr Mahathir is still our president and Prime Minister.

"His announcement is not timely and his services are needed for many more years to come."

Pasir Mas division chief Datuk Paduka Ibrahim Ali said:

"There was no indication at all.

"He was so jovial, even talking about wresting Kelantan from Pas during the dinner with Kelantan Umno members last night."

Now that Dr Mahathir had decided to carry on, he said, the Malays, particularly Umno members must strive to change.

"He was disappointed with the Malays and had chosen the party general assembly to announce his resignation because this is the right platform for such an announcement.

"If we want him to continue leading the party, then we all have to change," he added.

Rafidah's deputy Datuk Shahrizat Abdul Jalil said Dr Mahathir's leadership is needed by the country.

She said as a junior Minister she had seen Dr Mahathir performing his duties well and even had more energy than the younger Ministers.

"I don't see why he must resign," said Shahrizat.

Datuk Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir said the party still needed Dr Mahathir and this was reflected from the response of delegates and observers following the assembly proceedings in and outside the hall.

"Although he was reluctant, he has decided to stay and we are very happy," he added.

Perlis Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim said Malays including those from the Opposition did not want him to resign at the time when they really needed him.

"This kind of decision should be discussed and planned together.

"He should not make a decision without consensus," he added.

Shahidan also reminded Malays to take Dr Mahathir's advice seriously if they want him to continue.

Kedah Umno information chief Datuk Badruldin Amiruldin said Umno and the country still needed Dr Mahathir as a leader.

"He cannot resign because we need him," he said.

Tambun Member of Parliament Datuk Ahmad Husni Hanadzlah said Dr Mahathir

decided to withdraw his decision after the appeals.

Umno permanent chairman Tan Sri Sulaiman Ninam Shah said he was shocked with Dr Mahathir's decision.

"It was so unexpected.

"For as long as I can remember in my 27 years as chairman this is the most shocking news.

"Lucky my heart is still strong, otherwise I would have collapsed.

"All the Umno members have unanimously agreed not to accept his decision, however, as the party president he can still resign if he wants to."

Backbenchers Club chairman Datuk Dr Jamaludin Mohd Jarjis said the announcement came as a shock to all.

"We are still deeply shaken.

"The club will not accept his decision.

"We still want him to continue being the president and Prime Minister."

Supreme council member Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said Dr Mahathir should not leave Umno now but continue to be its guiding light.

"He should continue being president.

"We are still in a daze, it was so unexpected."

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