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Rally behind Abdullah, Malaysians urged

Ashraf Abdullah; Firdaus Abdullah

PETALING JAYA, Wed. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today urged all Malaysians to rally behind Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, his deputy and chosen successor.

Dr Mahathir said he was confident that Abdullah would receive the full support of Umno and Barisan Nasional leaders as this would help to ensure smooth transition of power in the party and Government.

According to the plan, Abdullah will take over as Umno president and Prime Minister in 16 months when Dr Mahathir resigns.

Speaking to a large crowd which had gathered at the Royal Malaysian Air Force Base in Subang as early as 4.30am to welcome him from a 10-day holiday abroad, Dr Mahathir, said:

"Thank God. We must be thankful for the peace in our country because a transition of power in the Government in other countries would normally be plagued by all sorts of problems.

"I believe that our country has huge potential for development and to become a developed country by 2020 or even earlier in some areas," he said, adding that the target could only be achieved if there was no infighting and if peace and stability prevailed.

The Prime Minister also said there should not be a power struggle from among Umno leaders for the posts of Deputy Prime Minister and deputy Umno president.

Dr Mahathir said party leaders had given him the assurance that they would not jostle for positions which would only create factions and weaken the party.

He said as he would not be holding any party and government positions after October next year, he would have a lot of time to meet the people and explain government policies to them.

"I hope I can meet as many people as possible to explain the need for us to continue with our current policies," he said.

Dr Mahathir said although he would no longer be the Prime Minister and party president after 16 months, he would not disappoint the people.

Thanking the crowd for the continuous support, Dr Mahathir said:

"I will continue to give my service to the party even though I will no longer hold any post. I want to meet more people, the party members, to explain to them our Government's policies and how important it is that we carry on with them.

"I feel very inspired by your support," he continued. "Even though I might not be Prime Minister or Umno president, I will not disappoint you."

He said while on holiday, he had thought about his decision.

"I now feel that my decision is good for the people and the nation," he said.

He urged the people to support the leadership transition and gave the assurance that he would continue to serve the party and nation.

Before he left the stage, 15-year-old Ilya Qastalanni Haulilah Nordin presented him with the lyrics of a song entitled Khalifah Kita (Our Caliph), a project by advertising company Ross & KNZ Sdn Bhd and IT company Three Aganet Technology Sdn Bhd.

Visibly touched by the gift, his parting words before he left the stage were: "I am only one of the many caliphs. All of you are caliphs too."

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