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Umno welcomes Dr M's decision

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Umno leaders and members today welcomed Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's decision to remain as party president and Prime Minister until October next year.

Expressing sadness that Dr Mahathir will call it quits after 22 years as Prime Minister and Umno president, they generally said his continued leadership was necessary to ensure the smooth handing over of power to his deputy, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Umno Information chief Tan Sri Megat Junid Megat Ayob said Umno would go to the ground to explain Dr Mahathir's decision to party members.

This was important so that they would understand the Prime Minister's reason for wanting to relinquish all party posts.

Megat Junid also expressed support for Abdullah as Dr Mahathir's successor.

Puteri Umno pro-tem chief Azalina Othman Said believed Umno leaders would co-operate to see a smooth transition of power. She said since Dr Mahathir had made up his mind, it was only right for party members to accept his decision.

Puteri Umno, she said, respected the decision taken by Dr Mahathir.

Backbenchers' Club chairman Datuk Jamaludin Mohd Jarjis said Dr Mahathir had put party interest first when he decided to retract his resignation and to step down in October next year.

This, he said, was done to ensure there was a smooth transition of power. "A smooth and systematic transition of power also shows maturity in Umno."

Jamaluddin also expressed support for Abdullah as Mahathir's successor.

Supreme council member Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said: "Dr Mahathir's decision to ensure that the handing over of leadership is smooth has helped sustain the confidence of foreign investors, the corporate sector and the public.

"Pak Lah is the perfect candidate as not only is he the deputy but the PM has given us the directive to accept him as his successor."

Umno supreme council member Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah said: "We have to realise that he will have to retire. We all want him to continue but since he has made a fully thought-out decision, we have to respect it.

"If he stays on, his credibility will suffer as people will think he pulled a sandiwara (play-acting). But he is very sincere and he is asking us to understand, and we must respect this."

Negri Sembilan Menteri Besar Tan Sri Isa Samad, speaking on behalf of the State Umno liaison chiefs and deputy chiefs, said they would explain Dr Mahathir's decision to grassroots members soon.

They also gave undivided support to Abdullah to carry out his duties as acting Prime Minister.

"There will not be uncertainties. We will ensure members understand the decision made by the supreme council," said Isa.

Kedah Wanita chief Rosnah Majid said this was the best arrangement for the party and country. The country could not afford a messy transition as political stability was important for economic growth.

"I think 15 months is a good period for adjustment as Dr Mahathir will still be around to assist. The arrangement shows that everyone has the party and national interests as his priority," she said.

She said this was the best possible way to retire. "He chose the date of

his retirement; how often do world leaders get to do that?"

Umno Youth Exco member Shaziman Abu Mansor said all parties should respect Dr Mahathir's decision and the stand taken by the supreme council.

"We are thankful that Dr Mahathir has decided to remain until October next year and we hope he will continue to contribute towards the well-being of the nation and party even after his retirement."

Shaziman said that Abdullah was the right candidate to succeed Dr Mahathir. "I am confident the party will unite under Abdullah's leadership."

He said Umno had managed effectively the issue surrounding the president's decision to resign.

Leaders come and go, but it was important that the party remained united, Shaziman said.

Kota Baru division chief Zaid Ibrahim said Abdullah should be given all the latitude and confidence to carry out his duties, if the transition period was to be effective and meaningful.

"We should use this time to do all that is necessary to allow Abdullah to succeed a person as formidable as Dr Mahathir."

There should be, said Zaid, no more uncertainty by October next year, and "I am sure he will prove his mettle".

An orderly transition has always been Umno's strength.

He said for the time being, there was no drastic change and this augured well for stability and confidence.

Bagan Umno division chairman Datuk Abdul Latiff Mirasa said Dr Mahathir, as a true leader, had ensured a smooth transition in handing over Umno presidency and the office of Prime Minister to Abdullah.

"Dr Mahathir is truly a unique and a very able and intelligent leader that all of us are proud of," Abdul Latiff said.

"He has ensured that Malaysia would still be in the hands of an able leader in Abdullah when he resigns next year."

Cheras Umno division chief Datuk Syed Ali Al-Habshee said Abdullah would now have the time to prepare for the challenges ahead.

His division, said Syed Ali, fully supported the decision. "We will give Abdullah 100 per cent support, as he is the most suitable man to replace Dr Mahathir."

With the support of the Umno supreme council and Cabinet members, Abdullah will be prepared.

Syed Ali said he had enormous respect for Dr Mahathir when he put the party and country first, even before his family.

"For that, this division pledges to do whatever he had urged the Malays to do at the party's 56th general assembly."

Kuala Terengganu Umno Youth chief Din Adam said he was confident Abdullah would lead Umno ably.

"The important thing is the image and morale of the party. Abdullah is more than able to lead Umno."

"Abdullah is the right choice to be acting Prime Minister."

Din said no matter who was at the helm, he was confident of the unity of the Malays, which he said would continue to improve under Abdullah's leadership.

Parliamentary secretary in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Noh Omar said he was happy Dr Mahathir had respected the appeal by the Barisan Nasional coalition party leaders and members to remain in office.

"Though it is only for a transitional period, he has respected the leaders' and people's call."

He said the time had also come for Malaysians to respect Dr Mahathir's decision to resign as Prime Minister and president of Umno and BN.

Malaysians must continue to remain united and give their undivided

support to Abdullah.

"It's crucial that Malaysians, including leaders and members of all BN coalition parties, remain united for the nation's political, economic and social stability."

Umno Youth social welfare bureau chief Ismail Sabri Yaakob said the uncertainty and speculation had finally come to end with the announcement.

"Dr Mahathir's announcement had so strongly affected the stock market. Many party leaders and members, including people of all walks of life, felt uncomfortable as uncertainty had prevailed since Sunday."

He said people should respect Dr Mahathir's decision as he devoted most of his life for the nation, the people, race and religion and should be given time to be with his family.

Ismail said they were grateful Dr Mahathir had decided to stay on till October next year, giving ample time for Abdullah to assume leadership.

Kuala Selangor Umno division head Mohd Daud Tarihep said although Malaysia was going to lose a very capable leader who had taken the country to greater heights, the people must accept his decision to step down.

"Since the Umno supreme council has already accepted Dr Mahathir's decision, we must also give the due respect, though it is with a heavy heart."

In thanking Dr Mahathir for his untiring service to the nation the past 21 years, Daud said the country had seen tremendous development under his leadership and hoped all his vision and dreams would become a reality under the leadership of Abdullah.

He said Dr Mahathir had built the nation to what it was today with many developed and under-developed countries looking up to it.

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