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Unacceptable for Dr M to leave without giving notice

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DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad always gives good copy, whether as Umno president or Prime Minister. In journalistic language, he seldom fails to generate interesting stories for the media.

Simply put, he is Page One material, more often than not.

Even when he was deputy to then Prime Minister Tun Hussein Onn, Dr Mahathir generated exciting or controversial stories or comments. Very seldom would he respond to journalists' questions with the much-used and abused "no comment".

It was after speaking at a seminar in Bangi in the early 1980s that Dr Mahathir, as Deputy Prime Minister, declared that Malaysia would shoot Vietnamese refugees as they make their way to the country's shores.

This was at the height of the boat-people problem.

Of course, he had a qualifier - that the Government would have to seek parliamentary approval. The matter did not make it to Dewan Rakyat but his statements, carried by the world Press, attracted international attention.

This led to the gradual process of other countries coming forward to help with the resettlement of the hordes of Vietnamese refugees landing along the coastline.

Prior to his comments, Malaysia was left to handle the burden almost entirely alone.

So when he announced his intention to step down from all posts in Umno and the ruling Barisan Nasional, it inevitably made good copy.

But to Umno, and the nation, this was certainly not the kind of Page One story they would want to read over breakfast or hear over prime time TV news.

He cannot choose to leave the post at a time convenient only to him. He may be the president of Umno and chairman of BN, but his departure from office must be made after full discussions (and agreement) between himself and, on this occasion, the party's supreme council.

To have stunned the assembly and nation with this announcement amid his free-flowing winding-up speech, and without any warning whatsoever, is certainly unacceptable.

That Umno needs him was seen and heard yesterday; that the country too needs and still depends on him is, to say the least, an understatement.

Dr Mahathir is not Umno president solely by his own choice. He is also the popular and undisputed choice of party members.

Hence, the party must at least share in his decision-making to quit from the top post.

It is now the duty of the supreme council to explain to members and the nation what convinced Dr Mahathir to agree to stay on as party president.

It is equally important too for Dr Mahathir to share his reasons for wanting to terminate his presidency.

This must be done immediately in the political, economic and social interests of the nation.

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