

# President happy to leave at Umno's peak

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DATUK SERI Dr Mahathir Mohamad is satisfied that he is stepping down as Umno president when the party is at its peak and pledged his services to help his successor.

"It is gratifying that there is so much support for the party. I am leaving at a time when I have restored the party.

"Support for the party is self-sustaining but whatever I can contribute - to speak to the people, to tell the people what Umno is all about - I have given my pledge to Datuk Seri Abdullah (Ahmad Badawi).

"If he needs me to do anything, I am at his beck and call," he said at the end of the 54th Umno General Assembly here yesterday.

The Prime Minister said Umno had regained its vitality because the party had been able to explain its actions.

"In 1999 (when the last general election was held) people did not understand what we

did and why we had to do what we did."

He said he was forced to take certain actions but he acted according to the law.

However, he said, certain quarters dismissed his actions as manipulating the laws.

"So, you cannot do anything right. You are damned if you do and damned if you don't," he added.

The Umno president said he was surprised that he did not shed any tears (in his farewell winding-up speech) as many quarters had expected him to be emotional.

"I was surprised myself. I was afraid to make that speech, in case I misbehaved again," he quipped.

"But God is great, I managed to go through it without the famous breakdown," he added, in reference to his emotional retirement announcement that shook the nation last year.

Asked whether his speech was part of a move to gear the

party up for the general election, Dr Mahathir said: "I admit it has something to do with elections."

"But it also has to do with Umno's responsibility to bring Muslims back to the true path."

On whether he would reconcile with leaders who had left Umno, Dr Mahathir said some had returned to the party, including Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah.

On possible reconciliation with Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim (his former deputy), Dr Mahathir replied: "He is in jail. If the party wants to accept him after I leave, I have no right to say no."

"But when you are in the party, you must tight for the party."

"In politics, there is nothing constant. There are always changes.

"Friends become foes and vice versa. Sometimes, I feel sad but everything turns out to be all right."