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PM: Give full support to Abdullah (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Repeating his earlier calls, and consistent with his stand on party unity, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today advised Umno supreme council members to give their undivided support to his successor, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Dr Mahathir, who will officially step down as Prime Minister and party president at 3pm tomorrow, said: "Abdullah will hold the Prime Minister's post tomorrow. Under clause 9.9 of the party constitution, he will also become acting Umno president.

"He will also hold the party treasurer's post which I am holding now," he said at a Press conference after chairing his last supreme council meeting at Umno headquarters.

Dr Mahathir started his Press conference after the supreme council meeting on a solemn note, urging Umno leaders to continue with the ways and policies set by earlier leaders such as former presidents Datuk Onn Jaafar, Tengku Abdul Rahman, Tun Abdul Razak and Tun Hussein Onn.

In an almost breaking voice, he said Umno must continue sharing and working with all the other Barisan Nasional component parties and other races.

"Umno must ensure fair administration for all the races, but at the same time ensure that the rights and privileges of Malays and Bumiputeras are upheld," he said.

Expressing his gratitude to Umno for giving him the opportunity to serve as party president and Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir said he would continue working for its future betterment.

Earlier, in the true fashion of Dr Mahathir, the eve of his retirement was no breather for the Prime Minister as he continued with his hectic schedule when he tabled the Mid-Term Review of the Eighth Malaysia Plan at Dewan Rakyat.

He took two hours to deliver his speech, his last in Parliament as Prime Minister. The 193-member House was almost full as Members of Parliament turned up in force to bid farewell to the man who has led the nation over the last 22 years.

The tabling was telecast live by RTM.

Dr Mahathir arrived at Parliament House at 10am where he replied to questions on Malaysian democracy and Malaysian bonds during the one-hour question time.

As the Prime Minister went about his official duties, about six million students nationwide paid tribute to him in special assemblies held simultaneously in schools.

Also present at the Press conference were Abdullah, Umno secretary-general Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob, the three vice-presidents - Datuk Seri Najib Razak, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin and Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib - Wanita Umno chief Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, Umno Youth chief Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein and Puteri Umno chief Datuk Azalina Othman Said.

On the issue of appointing an acting deputy president, Dr Mahathir said this did not arise at present as there was no provision in the party constitution for this.

"Under the constitution, the supreme council has the right to decide on certain matters if there is no provision pertaining to these matters," he said.

Asked if Abdullah had given him any indication as to whom he had in mind

as the new Deputy Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir said in jest: "No, he is very mysterious."

On whether he was satisfied with what he had achieved during his term as Prime Minister, he said he was not.

"I know I have failed in many ways, but I know that I have succeeded in doing something. It is not for me to determine, but up to the people," he said.

Asked if he thought he would be remembered by the people, Dr Mahathir quoted Shakespeare: "The evil that men do lives after them. The good is often interred with their bones."

On his retirement, he said he was relieved.

"I have no problem with supreme council members. In politics, sometimes, they are friends and sometimes, they are enemies. I hold no grudge against anyone," he said.

Later, Dr Mahathir and supreme council members joined party members to break fast at Dewan Merdeka at Putra World Trade Centre. Some 10,000 party members and leaders from component parties had gathered and the night turned into an endless round of hand-shaking for Dr Mahathir and his wife, Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali.

In a brief speech, Dr Mahathir repeated his call to members to rally behind the leadership and strive to work closely with components of the national coalition. After the maghrib, isya and terawih prayers, Dr Mahathir went back to Dewan Merdeka for supper. The crowd who lined up to greet him sang Pahlawan Ku for Dr Mahathir. Many were moved to tears. He was seen off by Pak Lah close to about 10.30pm.