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Smooth sailing

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MANY people were caught off guard when Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad announced his retirement from politics and government last year.

Now, however, most of them, particularly Umno members, have come to terms with the voluntary resignation of the leader they admire and respect.

They had accepted the fact that the Prime Minister, who heads the largest Malaybased party in the country since 1981, will step down and his decision must be respected.

He, after all, will be leaving the party in the good and able hands of his deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Abdullah is ready to take on the responsibilities, and with undivided support from Umno's three million members, the 57 year-old party will continue to be the party for Malays and the backbone of the ruling 14member coalition, Barisan Nasional.

Umno members realise that Dr Mahathir's resignation is in the tradition of Umno as all party presidents have never been removed from position but resigned before their terms were up; the exception was Tun Abdul Razak, who died while serving his second term.

Malaysians are also proud that Dr Mahathir has proven that he is no lame duck. The 77-year-old statesman will continue to perform his duties until his last day in office.

Pas is the other Malay-based party and it is about to endorse its new leader, Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang.

The opposition party lost its president Datuk Fadzil Mohd Noor who died in June last year, and has had Hadi as its acting president since then.

Delegates attending the 49th Pas Muktamar or general assembly are almost certain to ensure a smooth path for Hadi to lead the Islamist party come September.

The most unique power transition is perhaps the one involving the Chinese-based MCA, which is the second largest among BN component parties.

The three-year leadership crisis, which had split the party into two factions - Team A and Team B - was amicably resolved when the leaders of the rival factions, Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik and Datuk Lim Ah Lek, resigned as president and deputy president.

Their resignations on May 23 saw the elevation of vice-presidents Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting and Datuk Chan Kong Choy to fill the No 1 and No 2 slots and now the party is on the road to reuniting its members.

MCA also took a pro-active measure to avoid a power struggle in the future when its recent annual general assembly amended the party's constitution to limit the term of office for the party presidency to nine years.

Parti Bansa Dayak Sarawak, one of the BN components, also saw a change in leadership when Datuk Amar Leo Moggie, the president of 20 years, decided to step down to concentrate on his duties at the Federal level as the Energy, Telecommunications and Multimedia minister.

Although Datuk Seri Daniel Tajem, who was the deputy president throughout Moggie's tenure as PBDS president, was elected the new president, the post is also being claimed by former party information chief Datuk Seri James Masing.

The splinter group headed by Masing also formed its own supreme council and the conflict has yet to be resolved.

The Sarawak Progressive Democratic Party (SPDP), the offspring of Sarawak National Party (Snap), had also elected former Snap vice-president Datuk William Mawan Ikom as its president.

SPDP, which was registered three days after Snap, the second oldest party in Sarawak and 41 years old when it was registered, is now a BN component party.

Snap, which had its deregistration lifted pending the outcome of an appeal on the ROS order, had elected a new president, former party supreme council member Edwin Dundang.

The president's post fell vacant when the party's long-serving president Datuk Amar James Wong, 82, did not seek reelection at the party's general assembly in May, to give way to a younger leader.

And if the ROS decides to give the nod to the proposed Parti Keadilan Nasional-Parti Rakyat Malaysia merger, the nation will be offered a new party: Parti Keadilan Rakyat.

The leadership of the new entity was announced at its "political launching" on Aug 3, with Keadilan president Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail appointed as president and PRM president Syed Husin Ali as the deputy president.

There are no changes in MIC and Gerakan, the other two big parties in BN with long-serving presidents.

MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu said he needed another two terms to handle a few unfinished business involving Indians.

Gerakan president Datuk Seri Lim Keng Yaik wants to stay in the post for a while for continuity.

Leaders will come and go but those who take over the helm usually do not deviate from the parties' struggle.