

NEW STRAITS TIMES

DATE: 21/05/2008

Analysts play down resignation

NST- 21/5/2008.

■ By David Yeow
news@nst.com.my

KUALALUMPUR: Smoke and mirrors, a distraction and sandiwara. These were the words used by political analysts to describe Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's resignation from Umno.

Although Dr Mahathir branded his decision as "radical, brave and the only way" to revive Umno and dared other members to follow his example, political analysts are calling his bluff.

Professor Dr Ahmad Nidzammuddin Sulaiman of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia's Political Science Department said Dr Mahathir's announcement was a classic display of political theatrics.

He said those unfamiliar with Dr Mahathir might believe that he was starting a media war with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

"I think he is trying to draw attention away from possible investigations over the V.K. Lingam case."

(Dr Mahathir, on Saturday challenged the government to charge him for his alleged involvement in a judge-fixing scandal)

"He (Dr Mahathir) is doing everything he can to discredit Abdullah. I think he is hoping that Abdullah becomes too preoccupied with the threat of a mass exodus from Umno to take action against him."

Ahmad Nidzammuddin said Dr Mahathir's action to quit will not result in a domino effect.

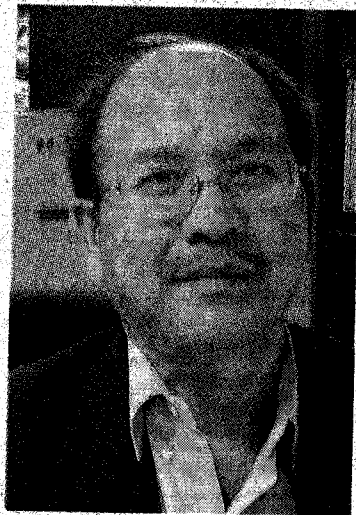
"Apart from party veteran Tan Sri Sanusi Junid, no one has followed suit," he said.

Even Dr Mahathir's son and Jerlun member of parliament Datuk Mukhriz Mahathir had announced that he won't be leaving the party.

Ahmad Nidzammuddin said the belief that Dr Mahathir's departure would cause a split in the party was unfounded.

Another political analyst Wong Chin Huat, agreed.

"I think the status quo in Umno



Professor Dr Ahmad Nidzammuddin Sulaiman says Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's resignation is just political theatrics

would remain, at least until December. Threats of a splinter group forming should only be entertained if Umno MPs or cabinet members start following Dr Mahathir's move," said Wong.

"Currently, what is happening with Dr Mahathir's rebellion is a lack of collective action. There is no incentive for others to follow suit.

"If no MP quits in the next two days, his gambit will lose steam and die a natural death."

Wong added that if Abdullah plays his cards right in the next few days, Malaysia might indeed see the end of the Mahathir era.

With Dr Mahathir gone, Wong said Abdullah would be rid of a powerful critic within the party.

He feels Abdullah can focus on rebranding his leadership style, building his own era by democratising the country further.

"If he does so then Abdullah stands a chance of not only proving to Umno that he is a strong leader but win back public confidence as well," Wong said.