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'Dr M's move may hasten Anwar era'

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Press Digest

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CURRENT affairs commentator Datuk Dr Cheah See Kian says former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's resignation from Umno may hasten Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) de facto leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's ascent to power, indirectly ushering in an Anwar era.

Asked by *China Press* to comment on the former Umno president's shock exit from the party, Cheah, who is the honorary principal of Han Chiang College, said Mahathir's decision to walk out on Umno and his call on party members to do like-wise is surprising. It is a political quake, he said.

"While Mahathir advised Umno members to quit party, he also urged them not to join other political parties, clearly showing that he wants a reshuffle of the party leadership to allow his men to assume power," he said.

Cheah predicted four likely scenarios as a result of Mahathir's decision:

» Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi stays on as prime minister and purges Mahathir's men from the party.

» Abdullah makes concessions and sets a time-frame for him to hand over power to Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak. There is the likelihood that vice-president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin might take over the baton from Abdullah, depending on the

results of the Umno elections later this year.

» Under pressure, Abdullah opts to cooperate with Anwar to consolidate his position.

» Some Umno elected representatives leave Umno to form a new party and work with Anwar to give the latter control of the federal government.

Cheah said Mahathir does not want Anwar to come back to power, neither does he want Abdullah to carry on as party chief and prime minister, but his decision to quit the party may serve as a catalyst for Anwar to seize power, indirectly precipitating an Anwar era.

"I believe Mahathir's choice of candidate for the next prime minister is International Trade and Industry Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin," he said.

"As far as I understand, Mahathir has sent his men to contact party leaders to urge them to make a choice between supporting him and Abdullah."

Cheah said this is a double blow to Abdullah with no less an impact than the March 8 "political tsunami".

It will also have a far-reaching impact on the country, he said, adding that the outcome will very much depend on how Umno leaders and members react to Mahathir's "make or break" move after failing to sway the party with his attacks on Abdullah in the last two years.

Cheah also likened the rivalry between Mahathir and Abdullah to a fight between two jumbos, which MCA and Gerakan should stay clear of in order not to get trampled.