

# I didn't have the slightest hint, says Dr. Mahathir

7 MAC 1976  
THE DAY HUSSEIN CALLED UMNO VICE-PRESIDENTS FOR A MEETING...

SEGAMAT, Sat.—

It came as a shock... but a pleasant one and Dr. Mahathir Mohamed accepted it as "one of the responsibilities of office."

He did not have the slightest hint that he would be entrusted with the high office of Deputy Prime Minister until Datuk Hussein's announcement yesterday afternoon.

"You may say it's a complete surprise. The Prime Minister did not even give me any hint that I may be the new Deputy Prime Minister," he said in an interview here last night.

"Datuk Hussein called Encik Ghafar Baba, Tan Sri Razaleigh Hamzah and me recently, but all he asked us was our views on a Cabinet reshuffle."

## Reshuffle

The three are all Umno vice-presidents.

Dr. Mahathir said: "The Prime Minister did not tell us anything else. He only wanted our views on the reshuffle."

The 50-year-old doctor pledged to "do my level best" in fulfilling the responsibilities of my new office.

"Whatever duties given to me by the Prime Minister, I will perform them to the best of my ability," he said.

"I do not quite know what is required of me, but I will assist Datuk Hussein in the best way I can."

He said he had no specific programme in mind relating to the affairs of the country. "It is much too early to speak of anything definite at this stage."

"But I have my own opinions and ideas for the good of the country. I will not hesitate to express my opinions."

On the Cabinet reshuffle, Dr. Mahathir said En-

cik Ghafar Baba had for a very long time wanted to resign. In fact, he had asked the late Tun Abdul Razak that he be exempted from contesting the 1974 election.

## No rift

He wanted a rest. He would continue to serve the people although no longer in the Cabinet, Dr. Mahathir said.

He said that his appointment as Deputy Prime Minister had not caused any rift in Umno.

Dr. Mahathir, here on a two-day visit, returns to Kuala Lumpur tomorrow.

Addressing a meeting of headmasters and senior teachers here TODAY, Dr. Mahathir said his appointment as Deputy Prime Minister would help him solve outstanding problems facing the Education Ministry.

He said he now had a greater responsibility and "perhaps a little more power, and I will use this to overcome the problems facing the Education Ministry".

Commenting on requests for wage increases and other demands by school heads and teachers, Dr. Mahathir reminded them to consider

the financial situation of the country.

The Government, he said, had now to channel more funds for defence.

In fact, he had directed the development division of his Ministry to review structural plans of school buildings to

suit the financial situation.

Dr. Mahathir stressed that the education service had the sole aim of imparting education to the young.

On calls by certain quarters to lower the entry qualifications for teachers so that more could be employed, Dr. Mahathir said this was against the aims of the country's education service.

## Provision

"These people are only thinking of their own interests but they forget the fact that the service is for the benefit of the young, and the higher the qualifications, the better the education the children will receive," he said.

Later, speaking at the opening of a school hall at Sekolah Menengah Tinggi, he said the Government would continue to provide the necessary facilities to ensure that Malaysian children received a proper education.

However, he stressed that the development and provision of such facilities could only be done in stages and according to certain priorities.

Singling out school buildings, he said millions had been spent and millions more would be spent on them.

He said all the problems involving the development of schools could not be solved overnight. It not only required finance but also human resources.

Dr. Mahathir appealed to schools to make maximum use of their buildings. Those that could be used both in the mornings and afternoons should be used as such.