

BY ABDUL RAHMAN SULAIMAN

KUALA LUMPUR, MAY 8 (BERNAMA) -- DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR MOHAMAD WILL DEFINITELY BE THE NEXT PRIME MINISTER IF DATUK HUSSEIN ONN DECIDES TO RESIGN BEFORE OR AFTER THE UMNO GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON JUNE 26.

POLITICAL ANALYSTS HERE FEEL THAT IT IS ALSO ALMOST CERTAIN THAT THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER WILL BE RETURNED UNOPPOSED AS PARTY PRESIDENT TO SUCCEED DATUK HUSSEIN IF THE LATTER TURNS DOWN NOMINATIONS FOR RE-ELECTION.

THEY ARGUE THAT FORMER SELANGOR MENTERI BESAR DATUK HARUN IDRIS THE ONLY OTHER PERSON NOMINATED FOR THE POST SO FAR BESIDES DATUK HUSSEIN, AND HAJI SULAIMAN PALESTINE, WHO HAS INDICATED KEENNESS TO CONTEST, ARE LIKELY TO WITHDRAW TO ALLOW A SMOOTH TRANSITION OF POWER.

TWO OTHER POSSIBLE CONTENDERS FOR THE POST, EDUCATION MINISTER DATUK MUSA HITAM AND FINANCE MINISTER TENGKU RAZALEIGH HAMZAH, WHO ARE BOTH UMNO VICE-PRESIDENTS, ARE ALSO EXPECTED TO STAY OUT OF THE RACE AS THEY BOTH HAVE PUBLICLY STATED THAT THEY WOULD NOT CONTEST AGAINST DATUK HUSSEIN OR DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR.

— BERNAMA MORE 1834/LK

PM-MAHATHIR 2 KUALA LUMPUR

IN THE EVENT THAT DATUK HUSSEIN DECIDES TO QUIT AFTER THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY, AFTER HE HAS BEEN RETURNED AS THE PARTY PRESIDENT, ANALYSTS FEEL THAT DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR WILL NOT FACE ANY PROBLEM IN MOVING UP.

ALTHOUGH THE UMNO CONSTITUTION DOES NOT SPECIFY THAT THE NUMBER TWO MAN WILL DEFINITELY MOVE UP IF THE PRESIDENT GIVES UP THE PREMIERSHIP, PARTY CONVENTION HAS IT SO, THEY SAY.

THE NEXT QUESTION LIKELY TO ARISE IS WHO WILL BE THE NEXT DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER IF DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR ASSUMES THE PREMIERSHIP.

ASSUMING THAT DATUK HUSSEIN'S SPECULATED INTENTION NOT TO SEEK RE-ELECTION AS PARTY PRESIDENT IS TRUE AND THAT DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR WILL CONTEST INSTEAD, SOURCES SAY THAT DATUK MUSA AND TENGKU RAZALEIGH WILL CERTAINLY VIE FOR THE DEPUTY PRESIDENT'S POST, THUS GIVING DELEGATES TO THE ASSEMBLY AN OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE THEIR CHOICE.

ON THE OTHER HAND, IF DATUK HUSSEIN RESIGNS ONLY AFTER THE ASSEMBLY, DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR WILL HAVE TO CHOOSE HIS DEPUTY.

— BERNAMA MORE 1837/LK

N100: (F)
PM-MAHATHIR 3 KUALA LUMPUR

MEANWHILE, UMNO SECRETARY-GENERAL DATUK HAJI MUSTAFA JABAR SAID HERE TODAY THAT HE HAD NO KNOWLEDGE OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S REPORTED INTENTION TO GIVE UP HIS POST.

HE NEITHER CONFIRMED NOR DENIED NEWSPAPER SPECULATIONS THAT DATUK HUSSEIN WOULD BE MAKING AN IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT WHEN HE OPENS THE JOHORE BAHARU UMNO DIVISION DELEGATES' CONFERENCE ON MAY 15.

ON THE REPORTED +IMPORTANT MEETING+ OF THE UMNO SUPREME COUNCIL SCHEDULED FOR MONDAY AFTERNOON AT THE UMNO HEADQUARTERS, DATUK HAJI MUSTAFA SAID THERE WAS NOTHING EXTRAORDINARY ABOUT IT.

+IN FACT IT IS NOT EVEN A MEETING BUT RATHER A KENDURI TO CELEBRATE THE 35TH ANNIVERSARY OF UMNO,+ HE SAID.

ASKED WHETHER DATUK HUSSEIN HAD ACCEPTED HIS NOMINATIONS FOR THE PRESIDENT'S POST, DATUK HAJI MUSTAFA SAID THE PRIME MINISTER HAD NOT DONE SO.

+MANY OTHERS TOO HAVE NOT DONE SO. WHATEVER THE CASE MAY BE, IT IS STILL EARLY -- CANDIDATES ARE GIVEN ONE WEEK AFTER MAY 31, THE CLOSING DATE FOR NOMINATIONS -- TO REPLY,+ HE EXPLAINED.

-- BERNAMA MORE 1841/LK

N101: (F)
PM-MAHATHIR 4 KUALA LUMPUR

ON WHETHER OR NOT THE VARIOUS UMNO DIVISIONS ARE ALLOWED TO MAKE FRESH OR ALTERNATIVE NOMINATIONS IN VIEW OF THE ANTICIPATED CHANGES, DATUK HAJI MUSTAFA SAID THERE WAS NO NECESSITY FOR THEM TO DO SO.

+THERE ARE STILL MANY DIVISIONS WHICH HAVE NOT HELD THEIR MEETINGS THESE DIVISIONS CAN NOMINATE SOMEONE ELSE IF THEY SO WISH,+ HE SAID. -- BERNAMA 1843/LK