

PM begins meeting MBs

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By KHALID JAAFAR

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad has started meeting the various Menteri Besar to discuss the appointment of MBs and state exco members.

Speaking to reporters after launching Farmers and Fishermen's Day, Dr Mahathir said he is meeting the MBs individually.

However, Dr Mahathir did not reply to any Press queries on his possible Cabinet line-up.

The Prime Minister has to appoint new Menteri Besar for Johore, Pahang, Selangor and Perlis to replace MBs who did not contest for state seat or did not contest at all in the elections.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Khalil Yaacob is tipped to be the new Pahang Menteri Besar, succeeding Datuk Seri Mohd Najib Tun Abdul Razak who contested a parliament seat. Deputy Dewan Rakyat Speaker Dr Abdul Hamid Pawanteh is likely to be appointed new Perlis Menteri Besar. Two names have been mentioned as possible successor to Datuk Ajib Ahmad in Johore: Deputy Trade and Industry Minister Haji Muhyiddin Mohd Yassin and State Assemblyman for Tanjung Puteri Datuk Yunus Sulaiman.

In Selangor, exco member Fahmi Ibrahim and Assemblyman for Batang Kali Mohamad Muhammad Taib are the leading contenders for the Menteri Besar's post. Incumbent Datuk Ahmad Razali Ali did not contest in the polls.

Asked whether he has received a telegram from the Penang Umno asking him to appoint the new chief minister from the party, Dr Mahathir said he had not received any such telegram.

Asked whether he would retain the post of Penang chief minister for a Gerakan man the Prime Minister replied: "I don't know."

Meanwhile, Penang Umno liaison chief Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said yesterday it is time Umno is given the opportunity to fill the post of chief minister of the state.

In a statement in Kuala Lumpur, he said that judging from the voting choice of the Penang electorate in the recent general election, it was clear Umno had been given the biggest mandate.

With such wide and popular support, Umno felt it had the obligation to lead the new state government, he added.

Umno is confident it can provide positive leadership for all the people of Penang without any discrimination as to race and religion in line with the pledge of the Barisan Nasional election manifesto.

However, Penang Umno was aware that the final say in who should lead the BN Government at state level lay with the BN leadership and it is prepared to abide by this decision, he said.

Umno won all the 12 state seats it contested in the general election in Penang while Gerakan won nine and the MCA, two. The DAP captured 10 seats in the 33-member State Legislative Assembly.

The present Chief Minister, Dr Lim Chong Eu, is from the Gerakan.

Also, Umno youth head Anwar Ibrahim proposed yesterday that Barisan Nasional component parties in Penang draw up a new formula on cooperation in the State Government.

He said that discussions on the matter needed to be held based on the political reality in the state, taking into account the big win by Umno compared with that of the other BN partners.

"The securing of 12 state seats by Umno shows that its position in Penang has further strengthened and become more effective," he said in a statement.

Earlier, launching Farmers' and Fishermen's Day, the Prime Minister urged the people to change their attitude to accept modern technology to enable them increase their productivity.

He said that through applying modern technology in farming the country will be able to produce more within less time with less people.

The Prime Minister refuted the opinion of some fishermen that modern technology is not suitable for the country. He pointed out that foreign fishermen have been successful using modern techniques to fish in Malaysian waters.

Dr Mahathir wants to see more farmers and fishermen seek other occupations because with the application of modern technology the country will require less labour in these sectors.

On padi cultivation, he noted that it would be much cheaper for the country to import all its rice requirement, but such a move will deprive all padi farmers their livelihood.

To enable the farmers to earn a living the Government has to control the importation of rice and provide subsidies to increase their income, he added.