

I'M NO DICTATOR AND I'VE NO GREAT WEALTH: DR M

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, asking "How many (people) have I shot?" dismissed allegations that he was a dictator with great wealth.

He said today that these accusations had "suddenly" cropped up as the Umno elections drew near because certain quarters were using them for their personal gain and because such talk "goes down very well in their campaign with some people who do not know (better)."

"Compared to (ousted Filipino President Ferdinand) Marcos, I haven't killed anybody yet. How many (people) have I shot?" he asked reporters after opening a seminar on the *New Economic Policy after 1990* at the Putra World Trade Centre here.

"If I'm a dictator, then I

must be a very great talker because some of our meetings last for five, six hours and if I talk alone, it would be a bit tiring.

"Our weekly Cabinet meeting is from 9am to 1pm. I suppose I'm giving endless instructions to my Ministers who are *patung* (puppets)," he said.

Dr Mahathir added that if he was a dictator, he would have banned the "many books written against me."

"The book that I wrote in the interest of the nation, *The Malay Dilemma*, was banned in 1969 but now all these books against me are not banned," he said.

"It must be a sign of a good dictator if he doesn't go around banning books written against him," he added.

On rumours of his wealth, he quipped: "Now they say I have a house in the Maldives. Where else? Well, we are very keen on the Antarctica. I think I have a house on the South Pole."

Dr Mahathir also dismissed Datuk Musa Hitam's claim that during his tenure as Deputy Prime Minister, he had criticised certain projects in private discussions with the Prime Minister.

"He saw me as often as he wished and we discussed (matters). There might have been some differences of opinion but certainly there was nothing that serious except on the appointment of Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah as a Minister (in 1984).

"On that he had some very serious objections and as you know, he wrote me a letter saying that if I went ahead with my decision (to appoint Tengku Razaleigh as Trade and Industry Minister), he would resign.

"I didn't take him seriously because I thought it was a bit too much to resign merely because you do not like another Minister. Even if I don't like Ministers I can't resign. Frankly, I

don't understand the logic of this argument," Dr Mahathir said.

He added that there was no mention of disagreement by Datuk Musa over the Penang Bridge or the Proton Saga in the latter's letter of resignation from the Cabinet last year.

Dr Mahathir also said that he did not "blacklist" Datuk Musa and added that he had never asked him to leave.

The Prime Minister also refuted Datuk Musa's claim that he (Dr Mahathir) broke party tradition in 1969 when he launched an "all out attack" against then Prime Minister and Umno president Tunku Abdul Rahman in 1969 through open letters.

"I did not campaign to unseat the Tunku. I only gave my opinion. Because we have democracy, we can give our opinion.

"Actually, in 1984 (in the last Umno elections), Datuk Musa believed in tradition

because when I spoke about the tradition of not contesting against the deputy president, he never objected. But now, (his) opinions have changed apparently," Dr Mahathir said.

Asked if he agreed with Umno secretary-general Datuk Seri Sanusi Junid's view that Datuk Musa would not want Tengku Razaleigh as Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir said:

"Well, all I can say is that these two are strange bedfellows. My record shows that they didn't agree with each other but now they do. But in politics, people do find themselves in strange beds with strange people."

Dr Mahathir also said that the Umno presidency was important because it enabled the person holding it to become Prime Minister.

"Anyone who wants to be the president of a party should form a party of their own and then we will have 1,000 parties and 1,000 par-

ty presidents.

"But of course if you become president of other parties you don't become Prime Minister. So it's very important to get on the ladder called Umno because it's a ladder to get somewhere," he added.

He dismissed any suggestion that he would leave office after six months to a year after the April 24 Umno elections as part of a "package deal."

"Someday I will leave but not because somebody wants to push me off the stage. I will leave on my own two legs. Those who hope to make me leave within a year should pray very hard or rewrite the party constitution," he said.

Asked if there was a split in Umno, Dr Mahathir said: "If one judges by the smiles we throw at each other, there's no split.

"But only God knows. I haven't developed the art of reading people's minds."