

GHAFAR IS NEXT

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Umno No. 2 will succeed me, says Dr Mahathir

KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has made it clear his deputy Abdul Ghafar Baba will succeed him in keeping with Umno tradition.

Dr Mahathir said when he spoke of not naming his successor on Saturday, he was referring to the second echelon leaders and not about his direct successor.

"There is no change. Encik Ghafar will succeed . . . when we talk of succession normally we are talking about the third layer, not the second layer.

"It is in the Umno tradition the man who holds the No. 2 post or deputy succeeds the president and that

is still the way I feel it should be.

"But the jockeying is not for the deputy's post but for the vice-presidents' posts. If I name the vice-presidents now, it would not be to the betterment of the party.

"As far as I am concerned (I decide only) on the second man, the rest is for the party to decide," he told a Press conference after the closing of the party general assembly at the Putra World Trade Centre.

He also said: "I, myself, when chosen by Tun Hussein Onn, was not the most popular candidate."

Ghafar, who was present at the conference, declined to comment on Dr Mahathir's statement.

"I do not want to talk," said Ghafar.

Asked if he would step in to stop the "jockeying" if the fight got too intense, the Umno president said he did not think it would be necessary.

He also said his two speeches warning against dirty politics would in some way reduce the amount of such tactics.

"What I have said would have some effect in moderating the dirty politics."

Asked if he would be offering himself for one or two more terms, Dr Mahathir replied: "I do not know about one or two more terms but if I am healthy and the members still want me, I think it is my duty."

Dr Mahathir also said the Government had received reports "from reliable sources" that former Bumiputra Malaysia Finance chairman Lorrain Esme Osman would try to damage the image of the Government, himself and his office.

"He has tried several times to get himself released and is now acting out of disappointment.

"It seems he has threatened to expose a so-called secret agreement with the Government, that we will help to get him freed if he implicated Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah.

"We have also received reports that certain foreign press and journals will publish his allegations. We have nothing to be afraid of, we were not involved."

On the general assembly, Dr Mahathir said he was happy with the way the meeting had been conducted.

He said there were more delegates this year because of Sabah Umno and also an increase in the number of observers.

"This goes well for Umno because of the large number of people who are interested in the party."