

Deputy PM's post: Dr M may follow tradition

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he has plenty of time to appoint the next Deputy Prime Minister, adding that he may fall back on the tradition that the Umno deputy president be appointed to the post.

The Prime Minister was asked on when he would appoint a new deputy following the resignation of Encik Abdul Ghafar Baba from the Cabinet.

Dr Mahathir, speaking at a Press conference after a closed-door meeting with Umno division heads this afternoon, said there was nothing to stop him from sticking to the tradition that the Umno deputy president be made Deputy Prime Minister.

He said he would make the announcement when the right time comes.

Asked whether he had the opportunity to meet Ghafar before the former Deputy Prime Minister left for overseas yesterday, Dr Mahathir said that he had not been able to meet him to discuss his position.

Asked whether he would be reshuffling his Cabinet following Ghafar's resignation, Dr Mahathir said he had not considered the possibility.

Asked whether the choice of Deputy Prime Minister has been made easier following Ghafar's resignation as Umno deputy president, he said: "It's possible ... it's not impossible."

Ghafar's decision not to defend his post as Umno deputy president has paved the way for Finance Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim to walk in uncontested.

However, Dr Mahathir said the appointment of Cabinet members had no relation to the Umno elections because the appointments were his prerogative as Prime Minister.

In a lighter vein, he remarked: "That's the privilege of being a Prime Minister ... I can appoint (Cabinet members) whenever I feel it is necessary."

He then recalled his own appointment as Deputy Prime Minister, saying that it was made several months after the late Tun Hussein Onn had named his Cabinet.

Asked whether there has been any development on the request by Australia that Raja Kamarul Bahrin Shah be tried in an Australian Family Court for allegedly abducting his two children, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia has rejected

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Australia's extradition request rejected

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the request.

He said he has been advised by the Attorney-General and the Home Ministry that there was no basis for the Government to entertain the request to extradite Raja Kamarul.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Home Minister, said he had signed the letter rejecting the request.

"I have signed the letter and handed it to the Foreign Ministry to be delivered to the Australian Government."

Asked what transpired at the closed-door meeting, Dr Mahathir said he advised delegates to vote wisely at the elections.

He said he would remain neutral in the elections, adding that the polls was important because it would help determine the future of the party.

Umno Youth and Wanita Umno will hold their elections at their general assemblies tomorrow, and the elections for the party proper will be held on Thursday when the three-day party general assembly begins.

Asked whether he was aware that candidates were using his speech and advice as part of their campaign strategy, Dr Mahathir said this was inevitable.

He said the advice was given because he wanted Umno to remain strong in order to rule the country.

He said campaigning had been very active and there was "talk" of a lot of money being used in the process.

He said he had not been able to confirm this, but warned delegates to be wary of those involved.

Dr Mahathir said dele-

gates should view candidates on the strength of their performance and track records.

He also advised candidates not to be disappointed if they lose in the elections as they could still serve the party in other capacities.

Asked why he had given the advice with the main party elections just two days away, Dr Mahathir said that it was a tradition that the party president advises delegates not to be over-enthusiastic about the matter.