

Dr M: No difference of opinion with Anwar

By Syed Nadzri and Mohd Yusof Taib

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today reiterated that there was no difference of opinion between him and his deputy, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

The Prime Minister said talk about the purported difference of opinion between him and Anwar were rumours spread by people who were not happy to see the stability enjoyed by the country.

The rumours were also triggered by people who try to interpret what he says and what Anwar says. The Prime Minister was asked twice today to comment on his so-called differences with Anwar.

Dr Mahathir was first asked to comment when he was interviewed "live" over television via satellite with the Asian Business News at Angkasapuri here.

At a Press conference later, Dr Mahathir was again asked to comment on the so-called differences.

Dr Mahathir said, "We agree entirely... I must say with my present deputy, we have meetings at least three times a week.

"Even this morning, I had a meeting with him to discuss matters relating to his job and my job. We co-ordinate very well."

The interview with the ABN studio in Singapore was conducted in RTM's fully-computerised RM15.5 million newsroom which the Prime Minister had opened earlier.

Dr Mahathir said stories about his purported differences with Anwar were concocted by people who were apparently not happy if there was no quarrel between him and his "No. 2".

"So, whatever I say will be interpreted by these people as signs of a rift between me and my No. 2," he added.

Dr Mahathir said there were many quarters who were hoping to see a rift between him and his deputy so that Malaysia's rapid economic progress would come to a halt.

Asked where the rumours could have originated, and whether it was the work of outsiders, the Prime Minister said the Press should know. "Outsiders, insiders — there are those who like to see people quarrel."

Dr Mahathir also said there was nothing much he could do to stop these rumours.

He said if he and Anwar were to speak in tandem all the time, there would still be people who would interpret it as a sign that Anwar had been forced to echo him.

"So, there is nothing I can say which can help eradicate the rumours," he added.

In the ABN interview, Dr Mahathir, who was also asked on the growing concern about corruption in the country, denied that it was rampant and said that corruption was minimal in Malaysia.

He said the country would not be able to achieve a growth rate of 8.5 per cent for the last seven years if it

PLEASE TURN TO
PAGE 4, COL 7

PM: ACA probe does not make Rafidah guilty

□ FROM PAGE ONE

was that corrupt.

Queried on the investigations being conducted on International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz by the Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA), he said: "There may be an accusation against her but it is for the ACA or the courts to decide.

"I don't conclude that (she is guilty) because there is an investigation.

"I believe in waiting for the process of justice to go through before we make any decision on whether there is corruption or not."

Asked if the pace of economic growth in the country would create a gap between the affluent and educated in the urban centres and the less educated in rural areas, Dr Mahathir said the increase in wages among the ordinary wage earners had helped close the gap between the two groups.

On complaints of the possible shortage of educated and skilled workers over the next few years, he said the Government was doing its best to overcome the problem.

He said Malaysian workers could pick up new skills easily and all the companies, both foreign and locals needed to do was to re-train their workers.

For instance, the Prime Minister said local workers have taken to computers very well particularly in the industrial and management sector.

than the Apec forum, he said given that there were now groupings like the European Union (EU), the North American Free Trade Agreement (Nafta) and the grouping of the Americas, there was no reason why the East Asian countries cannot group together as well.

"They have already formed exclusive regional trade blocs by forming EU, Nafta and now the proposed unity of Americas. They are the ones who have been excluding us. We have not excluded anybody. We remain open," said Dr Mahathir.

On the country's privatisation, the Prime Minister said the pace would accelerate because Malaysia had learnt a lot about how to carry out the programme and in the process, allowed foreign participation.

"We have always allowed foreign participation. They are able to buy shares in the stock market so that they can have a role in privatisation.

"But of course, we need to give a lot to Malaysians because we are still in the process of restructuring our economy."

Asked when the banking and financial services sector would be opened to foreign participation, Dr Mahathir said this would be done as soon as the locals could compete with the rest.

"Our financial institutions are rather small and they are not in a position to compete with big financial institutions coming out of

He added that they have been able to master computers in many areas despite having no prior knowledge of the technology.

Asked to explain his reluctance to agree on a specific deadline for the Asia Pacific Economic Corporation (Apec) to form a free trade zone by 2020, Dr Mahathir said this was because he felt that Malaysia and other developing countries would find it difficult to compete evenly with developed nations by that time.

"We are still far behind. For example, Malaysia's per capita income is US\$3,200 (RM8,320) whereas Japan's is US\$36,000. Can we really catch up with the developed countries in the year 2020.

"They are not going to stay still and they are going to move forward and it takes a lot of effort for us even to achieve our present growth."

Asked if this meant that he believed that Apec would not meet its self-imposed deadline, Dr Mahathir said if Apec countries tried to meet the deadline, "a lot of developing countries now will pay a very high price."

Asked why he thought that the East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC) was better

foreign countries.

"For example, today's newspapers said that Citibank is the biggest bank operating in East Asia and that is without the real opening up of the Asian markets towards financial institutions."

Asked to comment on rumours in the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange last week that elections were imminent, Dr Mahathir again refused to provide any clear indication of the polling date.

He said it could be held anytime from now and until the end of next year as the Government has a whole year to think about it.

"We are not in a particular hurry. We are under no pressure. So we will choose the time that we think is the best for us," he added.

Dr Mahathir denied that he had already prepared a list of Barisan Nasional candidates who have been selected to stand in the coming elections.

He said he had yet to decide on the candidates because the date of the election has not been fixed.

He was asked to comment on reports that such a list was being distributed in Kelantan.