

No guarantee leaders will remain forever, PM: Accept party

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today there was no guarantee that a leader, once elected, would remain forever.

He said that was what he told Kedah Barisan Nasional leaders and elected representatives at a meeting at his office this afternoon.

He said the meeting was called because the representatives had wanted to know his stand on the position of Kedah Menteri Besar Tan Sri Osman Aroff (following speculation that Osman was stepping down).

Speaking after paying a farewell visit to the President of Guinea Major-General Lansana Conte at Hilton hotel, Dr Mahathir said it was a good meeting and that "everybody was satisfied".

He said he told them that they should not be too concerned about such matters as leaders come and go.

This, he said, was a normal thing in politics.

He said the representatives expressed their support for his leadership and that of Osman.

Asked about Osman's position as Menteri Besar, Dr Mahathir said there was nothing on it and that he did not touch on the subject. "I merely explained the party process."

Asked if this means that Osman will continue to be the Menteri Besar, the Prime Minister said: "It is not that ... we are in the same position. Even I cannot genuinely guarantee that I will continue and likewise others too. The posi-

Mahathir also told those present that a change would always take place and this was for the good of the State and country.

He also told the meeting that sometimes it was good for fresh people to take over.

The sources said the meeting started with Kedah State Legislative Assembly Speaker Zainol Md Isa pledging support for Osman. This was followed by State Executive Councillor for Public Utilities and Communication (Assemblyman for Tanjong Seri) Datuk Abdul Rahman Ibrahim who said that they, however, would abide by whatever decision Dr Mahathir might take.

The sources said the meeting also touched on the Umno divisional elections.

At the end of the meeting, MP for Kuala Kedah Datuk Zakaria Said spoke on behalf of those present in support of the Prime Minister and his decision.

Osman was not present at the one-hour meeting although he had told reporters earlier in Alor Star that he would be attending.

The loyalty pledge for Osman as presented by Zainol was believed to have been taken at a meeting involving 27 of the 34 Kedah BN assemblymen in Alor Star on Aug 17.

The meeting, supposedly to discuss preparations for Gua Musang by-election, was initiated by Zainol.

Earlier, in Alor Star, Osman reiterated his earlier stand that he would leave it to the leadership to decide his future as Menteri Besar.

"My previous stand to leave the matter (his future) to the Prime Minister still stands. There is no need for me to comment further," he said when asked to comment on his future.

Kedah BN reps told decision

tion of all leaders, whether Menteri Besar or Ministers, is at the pleasure of the party ... if the party wants them to remain, there's no problem to that."

Asked whether those at the meeting gave their undivided support to Osman, Dr Mahathir said everyone declared undivided support for the party leadership, including for Osman.

Meanwhile, sources said Dr Mahathir spoke at the meeting of the need to accept leadership change.

They said Dr Mahathir told the meeting that when leaders accepted an appointment, they agreed that it would not be forever. But there had been instances that when the time came to make way for others, some resisted.

The sources added that Dr

Osman was speaking after addressing about 600 teachers at an education seminar on *Towards Fulfilling A Vision* at Institut Perguruan Darul Aman.

In July, Osman said he would only step down if the leadership asked him to do so. He said then that "I am not a person who disobeys orders".

Asked about the Kuala Lumpur meeting, he said he did not know the agenda of the meeting because it was "called by the Prime Minister".

"I think there is no agenda; it is just a meeting with the Prime Minister."

Asked whether it was true that the assemblymen who supported him would pledge their support for him at the

Osman: I will leave it all to the leadership

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meeting with Dr Mahathir, Osman said he was unaware of such move.

"We will have to see ... it is difficult for me to assume."

Asked on talk that the assemblymen had sent a letter to Dr Mahathir to pledge their support for him, he said he was aware of such a letter but he did not know its contents.

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On his feelings about rumours of his resignation, Osman said he was a bit disturbed by it "because a lot of people have been asking me about it".

"But I think I am used to it now. I am taking it in my stride, there is nothing more for me to say. I am leaving it to the leadership.

"As far as the public is concerned, there is no problem ... it is very difficult for

me to comment about myself.

"If you were in the same situation, you will feel very difficult too."

Asked on rumours that he was given a time frame to step down, Osman said: "It seems that they know better than me and the Prime Minister. They have been talking about too many time frames already."