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Mahathir-Successor

I FULLY SUPPORT ANWAR, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 22 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that he is giving his full support to Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim to succeed him.

The Prime Minister said that his support was in line with the wishes of Umno members who have chosen Anwar as the deputy president of the party.

"I will abide by the wishes of the party which has chosen Datuk Seri Anwar as my successor and I am giving him 100 per cent support," said Dr Mahathir who is Umno president.

He was speaking to reporters after receiving 14 journalists from the Balkan states at the Prime Minister's Department here.

Dr Mahathir was commenting on an "Asiaweek" article naming Economic Adviser to the Government Tun Daim Zainuddin and several senior Umno leaders as attempting to put Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, the former president of the dissolved Parti Melayu Semangat 46 who has rejoined Umno, back in the Cabinet and to ensure that he assumes a party post.

The article also speculated that Tengku Razaleigh might challenge Anwar for the post of deputy president in the party election in 1999.

Dr Mahathir described the article as pure speculation by the magazine with the intention of increasing its sales.

"It is not right to speculate but people who want to sell their publication would do things like that," he said when asked why reports on the Umno leadership still appeared although he had repeatedly stated his support for Anwar to succeed him.

He reiterated that Tengku Razaleigh's return to Umno was only as an ordinary member and that there were no conditions attached, including offer of any posts.

Asked whether there would be any change among the appointed members of the Umno Supreme Council and in the party headquarters on Nov 28, Dr Mahathir said: "Just wait."

The meeting next Thursday will be the first by the Supreme Council since the Oct 10 party elections, and the agenda is expected to include the swearing in of the council members, the appointment of 10 additional ordinary members by the president and the appointment of various party officials.

On the proposed PAS-Umno coalition in Kelantan, Dr Mahathir said that there had not been any formal discussion between the two parties so far.

He said that Umno was still keeping an open mind on the matter and would not reject the proposal if it would be of benefit.

"At the moment I would not say whether it was necessary or not (to have a meeting between leaders of the two parties). If there is a need, I am prepared," he said when asked whether he was prepared to meet Kelantan Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat to further discuss the proposal.

Asked whether the proposal may be a PAS tactic to use Umno to overcome the various problems the party was facing, he said: "We will have to consider what it is that leads to the proposal."

He said that Umno has still not made any decision because he would first want to listen to the Supreme Council after having heard the views of Kelantan Umno members through Rural Development Minister Datuk Annuar Musa who is deputy chief of the Kelantan Umno Liaison Committee. -- BERNAMA

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