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Mahathir-Interview

MAHATHIR CONFIDENT ANWAR CAN TAKE OVER AS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 6 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he is confident his deputy Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim can take over from him without causing any adverse effects to Umno.

He is also convinced Anwar will not force him to quit.

Dr Mahathir said he is confident Anwar will be capable of continuing with what he has done so far although Anwar is different from him.

"I do not believe he will become 100 per cent like me. No one can become 100 per cent like me and I, too, cannot become 100 per cent like Anwar," he said in a special interview telecast over RTM tonight in conjunction with his 15th year in office as Prime Minister.

Dr Mahathir, who was interviewed by Utusan Melayu Group editor-in-chief Johan Jaaffar, said it was true there were many theories of conspiracy regarding his relationship with Anwar and both of them had often to come out with various statements to ease the situation.

According to him, this was because various quarters insisted in believing there was more to the relationship than what met the eye (mencari udang di sebalik batu) when in fact there was nothing more to see.

"The matter is as it appears, nothing more than that. But we Malays in particular like to read too much into things. If he gives me something, what is his motive? We always ask this question. We should, in fact, accept it at face value.

"I had to repeatedly clarify this matter because I found that it created all sorts of uneasy situations in the party," he said.

Asked if he ever doubted Anwar's loyalty and honesty, the Prime Minister said: "At times when you are inundated with all kinds of reports, you get the feeling that it may be true. I think whether I believe it or not, one day I have to withdraw from the post.

"And if I do not have trust in the person who is to succeed me, it is quite difficult for me to communicate with him."

Dr Mahathir said he and Anwar frequently held discussions and Umno's stand was not his views alone but was the result of party meetings and consensus.

"This is the way the party is run, and I am confident that when I am not in the party it will manage. The style may differ but the objective is the same," he said.

The Prime Minister was also asked on the involvement of his children in politics and business and whether he set any conditions, limits or controls on their participation.

"Actually there are, to the extent that my children sometimes got angry because they were not allowed to do this and that. I do not give them any place at all in politics and I do not help them even if they have the interest.

"One of them is keen but I do not want to help him. That is his own affair. It is also unfair to stop him. But to say that I want to push him forward, no, I don't do that," he said.

Dr Mahathir said his children can venture into business but as far as possible they should not have dealings with the government.

He said: "If they want to do business, do it with others."

Asked on the views of some people that he is fond of building monuments, Dr Mahathir said he did not build monuments for himself.

But for a country, the people must have something which they can be

proud of as a landmark.

"We say that our country has developed but there is nothing to show the signs of development that the people can see.

"So when we have a tower at least we know we have a tower and this is something which the people can be proud of, not me," he said.

In this connection, he said: "I do not need any monument. Only one monument, the low one which we want later. The tall ones which we build sometimes turn out to be monuments but these are all facilities, facilities for our country's development, infrastructure," he said.

He cited as an example the Kuala Lumpur City Centre (KLCC), which has the world's tallest buildings.

As KLCC was built on land that is extremely expensive, there was a need to get the most out of the land cost, he said.

"It is definitely a loss to build a pondok (shack) on land that is very expensive. So we build the KLCC in order to maximise the land use," he said.

On the Malays, Dr Mahathir said he considered the Malays to be more aggressive now compared to the time he wrote "The Malay Dilemma" book (published in 1969).

"Sometimes they become so aggressive that the campaign for posts gets too heated. But they no longer feel that they lack something, no inferiority complex. Many of them believe that what others can do they can also do, and this is the difference compared to the Malays during the era we were fighting for independence, when many Malays then were not confident that we can gain independence and rule on our own."

Dr Mahathir also spoke of the possibility of a "backlash" resulting from the extraordinary success achieved by the present-day Malays.

He said if those responsible, like the government leadership, had not early on reminded the Malays of the importance of not forgetting themselves after achieving success, he did not think the Malays could have managed their success.

This is because managing success also has problems like those encountered in managing poverty or failure.

"But we always remind ourselves and we hope the young generation in particular should know their origins," he said.

The Prime Minister was also asked whether he thought the issue of racial unity in Malaysia would come to an end or be resolved in the future.

"Times change. Previously, our emphasis was on assimilation. In other countries, too, there are no longer efforts towards assimilation and, in fact, in the United States they frequently talk about their roots. So, if we want to go back to the question of assimilation it may be difficult.

"If we accept that this is not possible, we need to find other ways to strengthen race relations," he said.

The Prime Minister also did not dismiss the possibility that the issue of racial unity, now pushed into the back seat by the strong economy and stable political situation, will resurface when there is economic recession.

"Of course, this is possible in a recession. But my hope is that when a downturn occurs the next time around, there will not be any disparity in terms of race. The Chinese will face problems, the Malays will also have the same problems and the Indians, too. So there won't be any more feeling of jealousy and envy that others are better off than us."

Dr Mahathir was then posed a hypothetical question -- would the Malays be better off if the country's political control had been dominated by the Chinese, just like the better position that the Chinese are in now because political power lies in the hands of the Malays?

While admitting that the hypothetical question was difficult to answer,

the Prime Minister said he believes the majority of the Chinese are pragmatic.

If the Chinese made up 80 per cent of the population, the Malays would have reason to worry but in the present situation the Malays constitute 56 per cent of the population and the Chinese only 32 per cent, he said.

"Because they (Malaysians of Chinese descent) are pragmatic, they will not do something that will ultimately jeopardise themselves," Dr Mahathir said.

The Prime Minister also said the problem caused by the presence of more than one million immigrant workers in the country now should be tackled because it is a "problem of success".

This problem resulted from the government's programme sometime ago which concentrated on job opportunities and, in fact, the government then was willing to waive tax on companies so long as they could create work opportunities.

"But suddenly, all our people have jobs. We cannot abruptly stop industries which require this manpower. So we have to carry on and this means we have to accept foreign workers," he said. -- BERNAMA

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