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Mahathir - Abu Hassan

ABU HASSAN IS CLEAN AND CAPABLE, SAYS MAHATHIR

By: E. Sivabalan

BLANTYRE (MALAWI), May 3 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he picked Datuk Abu Hassan Omar as the new Selangor Menteri Besar because he wanted a "clean and capable" person.

"I have not appointed a successor because I want to be sure that I chose the right successor, somebody who is clean, somebody who I know has got the capability to do so."

"And I have chosen a minister from my Cabinet to become the new Menteri Besar of the state," he told Malaysian journalists at a news conference here last night at the end of his three-day visit to the Republic of Malawi.

The Prime Minister made the comments in English in reply to questions posed by Malaysian journalists because he wanted the Malawian leaders and journalists who also attended the news conference to know what the issue was all about.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno President, said Abu Hassan would have to resign from his post and contest a Selangor state seat if he were to take over from Tan Sri Muhammad Mohd Taib who resigned on April 14.

Muhammad is facing two charges in an Australian court for failing to declare the equivalent of RM2.4 million while leaving the Brisbane International Airport for New Zealand last Dec 22 and for making false declaration.

Dr Mahathir was expected to announce Muhammad's successor on April 21 after an audience with the Sultan of Selangor but he said he needed more time to decide on a suitable candidate.

The Sultan told reporters that he wanted a Mentri Besar who is "really clean " and not someone out to enrich himself.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim announced Abu Hassan as the candidate for the Menteri Besar's post after an audience with the Sultan yesterday.

Abu Hassan, who is deputy Selangor Umno Liaison Chief, has resigned as Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister.

He has also resigned as Kuala Selangor MP to contest for the Permatang state seat in a direct swap with incumbent Datuk Jamaluddin Adnan. Permatang is in the Kuala Selangor parliamentary constituency.

Dr Mahathir said, "Should he (Abu Hassan) wins, then he will be the new Mentri Besar of Selangor."

Asked by a Malaysian reporter what would happen if Abu Hassan lost the by-election, Dr Mahathir said, "Well, if he loses, I will have to think of somebody else."

Asked about the provision in the state constitution that a new Menteri Besar or an acting one will have to be appointed within 28 days of the Menteri Besar's resignation, Dr Mahathir said: "I think we still have a little bit of time. It seems 28 days is not (over yet)."

Dr Mahathir, who is also Barisan Nasional chairman, said a by-election could be held in about nine days and "I don't know if my addition (calculation) is not correct." --BERNAMA

ES ABG