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Mahathir-Anwar

ANWAR NOT TAKING DIFFERENT LINE, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, May 7 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad says he does not think his deputy, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, sometimes publicly takes a different line to him over issues but just that Anwar says things in a different way.

Dr Mahathir thinks this is because the words Anwar uses are more conciliatory but Anwar's views are exactly the same as his.

"He's much more academic. He likes to quote, but he says the same thing. I just give my opinion. I don't read very much," says the Prime Minister in a cover story interview with the Hong Kong-based Asiaweek magazine, in its latest issue which hit the newstands from today.

Asked if he would have preferred Anwar not to have deposed Deputy Prime Minister (Tun) Ghafar Baba as the No. 2 in Umno in 1993, the Prime Minister replies: " Yes, I would have been happy to have Ghafar continue. But obviously there was a lot of opposition and a lot of dissatisfaction. And the partymen indicated in many ways that they wanted a change. So, while I was prepared to stand by and be loyal to my deputy, I found that I could not be disloyal to so many of party members.

" Well, I had to. Apparently, he has the support," says Dr Mahathir when asked if he has come to terms with having Anwar, who was appointed Deputy Prime Minister on Dec 1, 1993.

To another question as to whether is he happy with Anwar now, Dr Mahathir, who has had two deputies before Anwar, says he cannot be changing deputies all the time.

" I think if you change deputies too many times, it must be because you are wrong and not them. I have a very simple measure for this: if you dislike too many people, then you are wrong.

" On the other way round, if you are together with a lot of people, then I think you are likely to be right."

Asiaweek also asked Dr Mahathir, who is into his 16th year as Prime Minister, if he thinks he has been in office too long.

To this, he says to his own assessment, the people who want him out are not as many as those who want him to stay on.

He says people will think that he has been Prime Minister too long but one thing certain is that the certainty of his departure will undermine his ability to run the country.

This, he says, is the problem with many countries whose leaders are only allowed to do one term.

He argues that people do not respect the one-term leaders because they are going to go out anyway.

But Dr Mahathir reiterates that he does not want to be Prime Minister forever.

Talking about power, he says he does not enjoy having power but finds it useful in carrying out the things he wants to do.

Power is necessary in order to lead because if a leader just responds to his followers and does exactly what they want, then he is not a good leader, he says.

He also stresses the importance for leaders to come out with ideas all the time.

Asked what he considers his single greatest achievement, his answer was short and simple: " Well, I don't know. That I am still here is an achievement."

Dr Mahathir also agrees with the view that he considers his position as Umno president as more important than being Prime Minister.

He says this is because he depends on the party, without which " I am nothing".

"And I also consider my speech to Umno every year as the most important speech that I give, because it sets the tone for the party."

He says that last year he used his position as party president to prevent a challenge to the top two posts in the party because a challenge will break up Umno.

In his view, there is nothing to be gained from a leadership challenge as his idea is that when he hands over the party to his successor, he will hand over the whole party.

" I don't want to have a fractionalised party, which when the other chap wins, and he gets the party, he gets only a faction. The other faction stays out. That will weaken the party," he says.-- BERNAMA

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