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Dr M appoints Anwar acting PM from May 19

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who will be on two months' leave from May 19, has appointed his deputy, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, as Acting Prime Minister.

Confirming this yesterday, Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Mohamed Nazri Aziz said Dr Mahathir informed the Cabinet last week of his intention to go on leave.

This would be the first time Dr Mahathir will be on vacation longer than three weeks since becoming Prime Minister 16 years ago. This is also the first time Anwar will be acting in the Prime Minister's absence.

The last time was when the Prime Minister made his then deputy, Tan Sri Musa Hitam, as Acting Prime Minister.

Nazri dismissed the theory that Dr Mahathir was taking leave to seek medical attention.

In fact, he said, it will not be an all-holiday leave for the Prime Minister, who is scheduled to visit several countries in Europe during this vacation to attract high-tech investments to Malaysia.

"His first destination will be London and then to several other countries," he told reporters at the Parliament's lobby yesterday.

Nazri said Anwar's appointment as the Acting Prime Minister is to ensure continuous smooth running of the government's administration because this will be the first time Dr Mahathir will take a long leave.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Abdul Hamid Othman, meanwhile, said yesterday's Cabinet meeting also discussed the matter.

Earlier, Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik quashed a newsreport that heavily publicised the decision by the Prime Minister to take long leave.

Dr Ling said Dr Mahathir will be involved in a series of visits to countries, starting from the UK, to promote the Multimedia Super Corridor. These countries will include Poland and Russia.

In between these visits, the Prime Minister will take some time out for leave. Dr Ling said his vacation, therefore, could be seen either way: as "breaks in between work" or "work in between leave".

"It is up to you how you want to see it," he told reporters after the Cabinet meeting yesterday.

Dr Ling offered a philosophical opinion on the concept of holiday at this point.

"Leave is firstly for rest. Secondly, it is also to free your mind from the routine day-to-day matter so that you can focus on certain important things which your daily routine does not allow you to do.

"That could be focusing on writing articles, collecting your thoughts or looking at new ideas.

"So leave is for rest and it allows you to sharpen your focus on certain things that you want to do, and of course, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, could be so many other items on the agenda."

"It could also be to allow for a training period for those designated to take over when the right time comes.

"The agenda for leave could cover so many unwritten things. I think everything is in order."

In the foreign news report, Dr Mahathir's leave was seen as "a move that could cement Anwar's ascend to the leadership of Malaysia".

The article said, quoting political analysts, that "whatever Dr

Mahathir's reasons may be for wanting to take some vacation time ... his decision is politically significant, especially with regard to the succession issue in the national leadership."

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