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Dr M: I need more time to name new MB

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday he needed "a bit more time" to pick the candidate for the post of Selangor menteri besar to replace Tan Sri Muhammad Taib who resigned last Monday.

He said he has to consider a few things before naming the new menteri besar.

After a meeting with the Sultan of Selangor at Istana Selangor in Shah Alam yesterday, Dr Mahathir told reporters he had informed the Ruler that he would be taking some time to identify the candidate.

"I will be taking some time. I have to study and be certain of many things before any decision is made. The Sultan is going overseas, so if there is anything important, I will inform him or wait for his return."

Asked whether the main candidate was Sungai Air Tawar Assemblyman Datuk Zainal Dahalan, Dr Mahathir said any member of the State Assembly could be picked to head the state.

"All (Umno) members of the assembly can be appointed menteri besar. It could be anyone ... whoever is suitable, we will appoint him."

Asked whether the new menteri besar would be from among the executive council (exco) members, he replied: "I did not give any name. I just say that I need more time."

Asked for the reasons in the delay in choosing the candidate for the menteri besar's post which had been vacant for more than a week, Dr Mahathir said: "There was no problem. And I have not shortlisted any one nor was there any recommendation. There is no need to rush. Why not more than one week ... is there any law on that?"

Muhammad resigned last Monday after being charged in the Brisbane Magistrate Court in Australia for failure to declare the equivalent of RM2.4 million in foreign currencies while leaving Brisbane International Airport for New Zealand and making a false declaration on December 22 last year.

Dr Mahathir had earlier met all eight Selangor exco members at the Prime Minister's Department for about 45 minutes before the audience with the Sultan.

"I told the exco members the same thing. I need time to study," he said.

The exco members are Datuk Zainal Dahalan, Datuk Aini Taib, Tang See Hang, S.S. Rajagopal, Datuk Dr Zainal Abidin Ahmad, Datin Paduka Rakibah Abdul Manap, Ch'ng Toh Eng and Abdul Fatah Iskandar.

In the interim period, Dr Mahathir advised the exco members to carry on their duties as usual. "They have given me full mandate to pick the new menteri besar and will support whomever is selected," the Prime Minister said.

At a separate press conference, the Sultan of Selangor said the new menteri besar must be someone "honest and clean".

"The person should not work for his own interest but the people. He must also be careful before giving out anything to avoid wastage."

The Sultan said although he preferred someone with experience and above 40 years old for the post, the candidate "need not necessarily be highly experienced".

As Selangor is a very important state, the Ruler said, Dr Mahathir had to be careful in selecting the new menteri besar as he (the Ruler) did not want history to repeat itself.

Stressing that it would take time to ascertain a suitable candidate, the

Ruler said Dr Mahathir had informed him that any decision would not be made in haste.

The Sultan said: "Dr Mahathir is of the opinion that the menteri besar must be clean ... so, to be certain of this, time is needed as all aspects (of the person) have to be looked into.

"Just wait for another two weeks, by which time I will be going to London. If no decision is made by then, he can wait for my return or send a representative to see me there (to get my consent)."

The Sultan will be in London from May 3 to 29.

Meanwhile, state exco members said they will support whoever is nominated by Dr Mahathir. Aini, who is in charge of Urban and Local Authority, said the Prime Minister did not name the candidate and advised the exco members to continue carry out their duties as usual.

"All of us have our own portfolios. The only thing which may be affected is the policy decision," he said.

Abdul Fatah, who is the state's Youth, Sports and Tourism Committee chairman, said Dr Mahathir had informed them that he needed more time to pick the candidate. He said Exco members agreed that the matter is the prerogative of the Prime Minister.

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