

07 MAY 1997

Mahathir-leave

MAHATHIR TAKES TWO-MONTH LEAVE, ANWAR ACTING PM

KUALA LUMPUR, May 7 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will be away overseas for two months on official and working visits punctuated by leave beginning May 19.

As he would be away for quite a long period, Dr Mahathir is expected to appoint Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim as acting Prime Minister.

Several Cabinet members and deputy ministers met today confirmed talk of Dr Mahathir's impending leave which spread since early this week.

Up to evening today, there was no official announcement and Dr Mahathir, who is now in South Africa, is scheduled to return home tomorrow afternoon.

Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, when met after today's Cabinet meeting, said Dr Mahathir will leave for London to promote the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC).

He is later scheduled to either make official or working visits to several East European countries including Poland, Hungary and Russia.

Ling said Dr Mahathir wanted to stay in Europe between the visits to save the trouble of having to adjust to different time zones if he were to travel back and forth.

"Instead of flying all the way back here and then all the way back there again, I think it's quite wise to stay in the same time zone," Ling said.

He added that given the hectic way the government was now running, it was normal for Dr Mahathir, who kept a full schedule, to also have a rest.

Stressing that he was expressing his personal view, Ling said that when a person goes on leave, it could also be that he wanted to provide a training period to whoever was designated to take over when the time came.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Abdul Hamid Othman said Dr Mahathir is expected to fully brief the Cabinet on his working visits and leave on Wednesday.

He said the Prime Minister had informed last week's Cabinet meeting of his plan to visit several European nations at one go.

"The Prime Minister will visit many countries. In between the visits he will take leave. Perhaps Dr Mahathir will visit one country, then rest first before visiting the next one. We'll know next week," he said when approached by reporters at Parliament House lobby.

"Normally Datuk Seri Anwar will carry out the duties of the Prime Minister," he said when asked to comment on reports that Anwar would be appointed Acting Prime Minister.

Meanwhile, Defence Minister Datuk Syed Hamid Albar said Dr Mahathir's working visits and leave have not been finalised.

"Let's wait for the Prime Minister's return tomorrow," he said at Parliament House lobby.

Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz said he learned that Anwar would be appointed Acting Prime Minister during Dr Mahathir's absence.

Asked why the need to appoint an Acting Prime Minister as Dr Mahathir had often gone abroad in the past without making such an appointment, Nazri said this time is different since the Prime Minister would be away for two months and "not for short spells" as was previously. -- BERNAMA

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