

22/04/1997

PM: I need more time to choose candidate (HL)

Ramlan Said

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today he needed "a bit more time" to select a candidate for the post of Selangor Menteri Besar.

The Prime Minister said he had to look into a few things before naming the person, adding that he had not shortlisted anyone replace Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib who resigned last Monday.

Emerging from a meeting with the Sultan of Selangor at Istana Selangor here, Dr Mahathir told reporters he had informed the Ruler that he would take some time to identify the candidate.

"I will take 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'll appoint him."

Asked whether the new Menteri Besar would be from among the Exco members, he replied: "I did not give any name. I just said that I needed more time."

Asked for the reasons behind the delay in choosing the candidate as the Menteri Besar's post had already been vacant for more than a week, Dr Mahathir said he had not encountered any problem.

"There is no need to rush. Why not more than one week (to pick the candidate)? Is there any law on that?"

On the outcome of his 30-minute meeting with all the eight Selangor executive councillors at the Prime Minister's Department earlier, Dr Mahathir said they had given him the mandate to pick the candidate.

"They will support whoever is selected. In the meantime, they will carry on with their duties," he said, adding that he had also informed them that he needed more time before announcing the name of new Menteri Besar.

Muhammad's resignation was announced by Dr Mahathir after the Umno supreme council meeting on April 12.

Muhammad, who was Menteri Besar since 1986, also vacated his positions as Selangor and Federal Territory Umno liaison committee chairman and Barisan Nasional Selangor and Federal Territory chairman.

He, however, retained his post as one of the three Umno vice-presidents and his Batang Kali State seat.

Muhammad is facing two charges at the Brisbane magistrate's court for failing to declare the equivalent of RM2.4 million while leaving Brisbane International Airport for New Zealand last Dec 22 and for making a false declaration.

At a separate Press conference later, the Sultan 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."

He 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 was 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 find a suitable candidate, the Ruler said Dr Mahathir had informed him that the 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 until the end of next month.

Earlier, when met outside the Prime Minister's Department, State Human Development, Education, Information and Training Committee chairman Datuk Dr Zainal Abidin Ahmad said Dr Mahathir did not name anyone to succeed Muhammad.

He said the Exco members had left the selection of the candidate to the Prime Minister.

State Budget, Finance and Local Authority Committee chairman Datuk Mohd Aini Taib said: "We will accept anyone. We also told the Prime Minister that we would support the candidate."

State Youth, Sports and Tourism Committee chairman Datuk Abdul Fatah Iskandar said Dr Mahathir had informed them that he needed more time to pick the candidate.

He added that the Exco members agreed that the matter was the prerogative of the Prime Minister.

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