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Cabinet briefed on moves to revive economy, says PM

Kamarul Yunus

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad quashed talk that the special Cabinet meeting yesterday was related to the rumoured resignation of his deputy and Finance Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

The meeting was called specifically to explain to the ministers the measures to be taken to revive the country's economy, he said.

"It (the meeting) was just to brief (them)... on all the details," Dr Mahathir told newsmen after a special interview which was carried live on television and radio.

The 90-minute interview was moderated by New Straits Times Press group editor-in-chief Datuk A. Kadir Jasin, with Bernama acting executive editor (economic) Yong Soo Heong and Public Bank Bhd's director of economics division Nasaruddin Arshad making up the panel.

Dr Mahathir was asked whether there was any truth in talk that, Bank Negara Malaysia's announcement aside, the "shocking" measures to be adopted by the Government include changes in the Cabinet line-up.

"Well, it has not happened ... to me this (talk about Cabinet reshuffle) is shocking. I don't know whether it is shocking now for you but it is shocking for me," he said.

"There is no truth ... until it becomes a truth," he added, when pressed.

"If he (Anwar) gives good reasons why he should resign, I will accept. If he (Anwar) says it is for health reasons ... I cannot breathe anymore ... how do I say you have to continue breathing? It all depends on the reason," he said, describing his relationship with Anwar as good.

In reply to another question, Dr Mahathir said Anwar and the Finance Ministry support the new measures.

"The executive committee of the National Economic Action Council, which decides all these (measures), is made up of myself as chairman, Deputy Prime Minister (Anwar), Special Functions Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin and other officials," he added.

Anwar had on Monday denied that he was resigning from any government or political posts.

Asked about the resignations of Tan Sri Ahmad Mohd Don and Datuk Fong Weng Phak as Bank Negara Malaysia (BNM) governor and deputy governor respectively last Friday, Dr Mahathir said they were unwilling to go along with the measures.

"Since it is the government's policy and BNM is basically a government institution, they have to follow the Government or else they have to resign," Dr Mahathir said, adding that he did not ask them to resign.

The Prime Minister also dismissed speculation that Petronas president Tan Sri Hassan Merican will be appointed as Bank Negara governor.

"As of now, Datuk Dr Zeti Akhtar Aziz is acting BNM governor. She is independent in carrying out her duties but she does not have the independence to undermine the economy. If anybody undermines the economy, they have to go," he said.

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