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Dr M to hold talks with BN leaders on next Sabah CM

Badrul Hisham Mahzan; Ramlan Said

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will be in Sabah on Thursday to hold talks with Barisan Nasional leaders on the next Chief Minister to replace Datuk Yong Teck Lee, whose term ends this month.

Under the power-sharing rotation basis introduced after the BN's victory in the 1994 State election, Yong is to be replaced by a Kadazan Chief Minister.

Speaking after chairing an Umno supreme council meeting at the party's headquarters at Menara Dato' Onn tonight, Dr Mahathir who is also party president, said the council had sacked former Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Harris Salleh for joining a new political party.

He said under the party's constitution, a member was not allowed to be a member of another party. Harris joined Parti Bersekutu in March this year.

Dr Mahathir said the supreme council had also accepted an offer from former Deputy Prime Minister Tun Ghafar Baba who wanted to help explain to the people the economic problems faced by the country.

"It is his sincere contribution ... do not interpret this as if he is making a comeback. He says he has the time to contribute to helping the Government address the economic problems."

The Prime Minister said the supreme council also discussed on religious freedom in the country in the wake of an incident in Kg Rawa, Penang where two groups clashed over the proximity of a mosque and a Hindu temple.

Dr Mahathir stressed that while the rights of other religions would be upheld, no attempts from any quarters to change the religion of Muslims would be allowed.

He said these rights included those related to places of worship.

He said co-operation from followers of these religions was needed as a decision had been made on places of worship built illegally, to be relocated.

However, he said any relocation needed to be carried out accordingly so as not to offend any religion.

Dr Mahathir was also asked whether the identity of the non-governmental organisation, alleged to have supplied false information to foreign media that illegal immigrants in detention camps were poisoned, could be revealed.

He said this could not be done as the authorities had not gathered sufficient proof which could stand in court.

In other developments, the supreme council has appointed six members as its representatives to the coming Umno Youth and Wanita general assemblies.

They are Datuk Dr Abdul Hamid Othman, Datuk Wira Mohamed Ali Rustam and Datuk Ibrahim Ali to the Youth assembly and Datuk Mustapa Mohamed, Datuk Tajol Rosli Ghazali and Tan Sri Dr Abdul Hamid Pawanteh to the Wanita assembly.

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