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Mahathir-deputy

NO DECISION YET ON DPM, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 13 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister and Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said he has not made any decision yet on the appointment of a new deputy prime minister.

This disclosure put an end to speculation of a new deputy prime minister being appointed at today's day-long Umno special general assembly to amend party constitution.

"I've not made a decision relating to the matter yet although many people who came to see me had asked me to do so," he said when reporters approached him on the matter at the close of the assembly at the Putra World Trade Centre here.

Asked on the criteria for becoming a deputy prime minister, Dr Mahathir said: "Exact replica of myself ... if it is possible. I know it is not possible, but the main thing is the policy that is to be followed ... not the personality."

"That is to give comfort to people who invest in this country, there will be no sudden 180 degrees turn.

"Quite a lot of people ... some fit here, some fit there, if they fit me completely, they will look exactly like my twin," he said when asked whether he had already found a candidate meeting the criteria.

On speculations that he would name a new deputy prime minister at the earliest possible time, Dr Mahathir reiterated that he would wait for next year's Umno elections to do so.

On his meeting with menteri besar and chief ministers over the appointment of a DPM, the prime minister said they were not the only people who came to see about it but also several others.

Dr Mahathir said: "At the moment I listen to all views."

Asked on the notion that a deputy prime minister would have to be appointed fast in the nation's and Umno's interests, Dr Mahathir said there were differing views on this.

In fact, he said, some were of the view that it would be better to wait until the party elections while others insisted a DPM be appointed before the party polls.

"Some of them even reminded me that I myself was chosen (as deputy prime minister) before the party decided on choosing a deputy president," he said.

On the constitutional amendments relating to party elections, Dr Mahathir said they were necessary to check malpractices and money politics.

"In my speech I stressed that it is now important for us to emphasise preserving a strong Umno culture... that allows no malpractices. We need much more than just laws," he said.

Asked whether the amendments could check money politics given that many aspiring members would contest in the party polls, he said: "I have no idea yet whether more or less people would contest, for the moment we don't know yet."

Asked why the special general assembly was a dry and lacklustre affair, Dr Mahathir said: "The session this time around was not exciting because it was merely to amend the party constitution. There were amendments which delegates unanimously endorsed and which required their presence for adoption. Without them being present we can't pass the amendments."

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