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DON'T QUESTION PM'S DECISION, SAYS NAJIB

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 7 (Bernama) -- Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said today no one should question Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's decision not to appoint a deputy for now.

He said Dr Mahathir had his own reasons in not wanting to fill the post of Deputy Prime Minister which fell vacant following the sacking of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim on Sept 2.

"It's the prerogative of the Prime Minister and we shouldn't question it. Naturally, the Prime Minister has given the matter due consideration," he told reporters after presenting a keynote address titled "The Economic Crisis: The Need For Stability" at an economic conference organised by ISIS.

Najib, who is also an Umno vice-president, said this when asked to comment on Dr Mahathir's decision not to appoint Deputy Prime Minister. He announced the decision after chairing the Umno Supreme Council meeting last night.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president, said certain ministers would be appointed to carry out the ordinary duties of the Prime Minister while he was abroad.

However, he said it did not mean that ministers concerned had received endorsement as candidates for the post of Deputy Prime Minister or Umno deputy president.

Najib said the Prime Minister had his own reasons in keeping the second highest post in the government vacant until the Umno general assembly next year.

"We accept the decision," said Najib, one of several Umno leaders mentioned as potential candidate for the post of Deputy Prime Minister and Umno deputy president.

Asked on the possibility that the contest for the post could split the party, Najib said: "If it's a healthy contest, maybe not...if there are power abuse and widespread money politics, it could undermine party unity," he said.

"...I believe the president has ways of finding out what is going on in the party," he said.

Najib also said Dr Mahathir had directed him and another vice-president Datuk Abdullah Badawi to jointly perform duties of Umno deputy president until party elections next year.

He said both of them were also entrusted with the duty of jointly chairing the Umno Management and Disciplinary Committee as well as other duties to be assigned by the president from time to time.

Najib, who is the coordinator of the Barisan Nasional (BN) rally planned for Saturday at the national stadium in Bukit Jalil, said that although the rally was cancelled on the advice of the police, the people would continue to be informed of current development in the country.

-- BERNAMA

RAZ ABG