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Senators urge Dr M to appoint DPM fast

reports on "Dewan Negara" by Ramlan Said
THE appointment of the Deputy Prime Minister was raised in the Dewan Negara yesterday with two Senators calling on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to appoint his deputy now.

They said the appointment of a Deputy Prime Minister would help overcome the crisis of confidence in the country.

Senator Datuk Zainuddin Maidin said the foreign media had been using the issue of the country not having a Deputy Prime Minister to justify their claims that Dr Mahathir had no plans to relinquish power.

"I feel appointing a Deputy Prime Minister now will help avert a bigger split especially among the Malays."

Debating the Supply Bill 1999, Zainuddin said matters like requiring a person to possess ideal qualities before he could be appointed to the post should not become the stumbling block.

"We have chosen someone pious and possessing fine leadership qualities to be the Deputy Prime Minister before but as we all now know, still he did not make it to the top."

On cronyism and nepotism, Zainuddin said the culture was not wrong, adding that it had helped produce many successful Malays.

"What's needed is a review of the culture to ensure that social justice is done and there is no monopoly of wealth."

In urging Dr Mahathir to appoint his deputy now, Senator Abu Bakar Ismail said he was confident that no one would dispute the Prime Minister's choice.

He said Dr Mahathir would receive full backing from Barisan Nasional component parties and the people.

"Appointing a deputy is his prerogative and everyone realises this. Let Umno elect its deputy president and the Prime Minister to appoint his."

On the action of several supporters of former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim in criticising the country from overseas, Abu Bakar wanted stern action be taken, including stripping them of their citizenship.

"They are running down their own country, something that we cannot compromise on. They can seek justice but don't allow themselves to be used by foreign powers."

On cronyism and nepotism, Abu Bakar said it was sad to know that the critics were also involved - as proven by the revelations that many of them have interests or own shares in various companies.

He also took to task United State Vice-President Al Gore for supporting street demonstrators and suggested that Malaysia move a motion in the United Nations to censure the US for violating the sovereignty of member countries.

He said the US must be punished for interfering in the internal affairs of countries like Iraq, Afghanistan and Malaysia.

Senator To' Puan Wan Seri @ Wan Asiah Ahmad suggested a review on the regulation pertaining to low-cost houses where unmarried applicants were not allowed to apply.

"But there are many single women who need a house as they have many dependents. They can't afford to buy houses except low-cost units.

"But since they are not eligible because of their marital status, where can they go then?"

Wan Seri said it was time that single women were allowed to apply for

low-cost houses.

Senator Datuk Norjan Khan Bahadar spoke mainly on the maritime industry in Sabah, saying it could contribute in the development of other sectors, like tourism.

For example, she said, if the industry was aggressively promoted, thousands of job opportunities could be created.

She felt that Sabah, with its many islands, was suitable for the development of the maritime industry.

Senator Datuk Joseph Balan Seling emphasised the importance of Malaysia enjoying political stability, thus the need for all to close ranks and support the present leadership during the economic and political crisis.

He said the ability of Malaysians of diverse religious and cultural backgrounds to live in harmony and peace indicated the ability and capability of the leadership.

On the capital controls, he said it was good to hear of assurances from the Government that the measures imposed would not be permanent, saying Malaysia could not afford to be in isolation forever.

Senator Abdillah Abdul Rahim touched on education, especially on the lack of mathematics and English teachers in rural areas.

He said an incentive scheme must be introduced to attract teachers trained in the subjects to serve in rural areas like in Sarawak.

"I have raised before the problem faced by some schools in Sarawak where English teachers have to teach Mathematics as well."

On information technology in education, Abdillah said as not all could afford to buy computers or receive electricity supply, he suggested that computer kiosks be set up in selected rural areas.

On the campaign to increase local food production, he said it was hoped that after the economic crisis, Malaysia would continue to produce its own food.

"When the economy recovers, we should not revert to our old practice of depending on imported food. In fact, the effort to produce more on our own must be intensified."

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