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Mahathir-Abdullah

ABDULLAH'S APPOINTMENT EASES POLITICAL ANXIETY, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 15 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the appointment of Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi as his new deputy last week has somewhat eased anxiety over the national political situation.

"It appears so," he said in an interview with Radio and Television Malaysia when asked whether Abdullah's appointment brought about a "calming" effect on the current Malaysian political scene.

The interview followed the taping of the prime minister's Hari Raya Aidilfitri message at Wisma TV in Angkasapuri here today.

Abdullah was named the new Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister in a Cabinet reshuffle announced by Dr Mahathir after chairing last Friday's Umno Supreme Council meeting here.

Dr Mahathir said: "The reaction I gathered later showed that his appointment was well-received and drew only little criticisms or adverse remarks."

National politics became a staple public topic after the sacking of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim as Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister and from Umno last September.

Dr Mahathir then became First Finance Minister and named Datuk Mustapa Mohamad Second Finance Minister.

On Tun Daim Zainuddin's appointment as the new First Finance Minister in last week's cabinet reshuffle, Dr Mahathir said he was confident that Tun Daim could again convince manufacturers, businessmen and foreign investors and that the Malaysian economy would be managed in a way advantageous to Malaysia.

"Tun Daim is experienced and knowledgeable about economics and finance. He had helped us get over the recession of 1986 and 1987," he said.

On the month-long house ownership campaign which ended last Tuesday after clinching sales of almost RM4 billion, Dr Mahathir said the overwhelming success and public response was beyond the government's expectation.

"This goes to show that there is affordability on the part of the people but they need to be convinced that any effort undertaken is done effectively," he said.

The campaign also showed that Malaysia was indeed capable of reviving her economy if the nation strived hard towards that objective.

On the country's manpower situation, Dr Mahathir criticised Malaysians who were choosy about jobs.

"Our people are choosy about jobs.. if only there are not so, I'm certain that they will not be jobless," he said adding that the number of those that had to be laid off because of the economic downturn was small.

The prime minister said under the present economic situation, the local workforce could replace the foreign workers who now numbered almost two millions.

Replying to a question on how to improve the quality of education in Malaysia, Dr Mahathir said it can be done including by changing the mode of imparting knowledge to students.

He said emphasis must be given to practical aspects than theory.

"We may also enlist the services of part-time lecturers in certain disciplines including in universities ... we will appoint "adjunct professors"

-- working and experienced academicians but give lectures on a part-time basis.

Dr Mahathir also said the government would monitor private institutions of higher learning to ensure they do not use uncondusive premises for education apart from ascertaining only qualified people were hired as teaching staff.

On the Sabah Election, Dr Mahathir, who is also Barisan Nasional (BN) chairman, said the ruling coalition was prepared to face the polls at any time.

-- BERNAMA

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