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Dr M says Umno will decide on successor

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs.- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that Umno will decide on his successor and he believed the party will choose his deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

He said if he stepped down now, Abdullah will naturally take over as Prime Minister.

"Umno will determine the question of succession. Of course, if I step down now, Datuk Seri Abdullah will take over.

"I think Umno will back Datuk Seri Abdullah as my successor," he told reporters after launching a commemorative millennium gold coin produced by Mariwasa Kraftangan Sdn Bhd for Bank Negara Malaysia. He said this in response to a question about his successor, a question which arose out of his comment earlier this month at the announcement of the new Cabinet members.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president, had said that this was likely to be his last term in office as by the next term, he would be almost 80 years old. He recently celebrated his 74th birthday.

Abdullah has been performing the duties of Umno deputy president since September last year when former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim was removed from his Government and party posts.

Asked if it was possible that the Umno general assembly and elections would be held earlier than June next year, Dr Mahathir said he had not thought about it.

"I haven't considered anything at all. We have plenty of time, we can take our time. We have to be prudent," he said.

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