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Mahathir-resignation

DR MAHATHIR QUASHES RUMOURS OF RESIGNATION

KUALA LUMPUR, June 17 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has quashed rumours of him announcing his resignation at the Umno general assembly tomorrow.

"I don't see why I should resign at this moment," he said in an interview with CNN aired today.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president, was referring to his earlier statement this week that he would be making a surprise announcement in his address to the assembly.

CNN journalist Lorraine Hahn tried to prod the prime minister into revealing what the surprise would be.

Dr Mahathir replied: "If I tell you, it won't be a surprise anymore.

"But when I am asked questions about these things, I normally say you wait until the announcement is made."

Hahn had suggested that talk was rife that he might be announcing his resignation with election fever gripping Malaysia.

But a witty Dr Mahathir told a bemused Hahn that "whatever announcement I make will be a surprise even if there is no surprise...that will be a surprise too."

"...I have always said that I need to have time to hand over the reins of the government to somebody who is capable of taking over from me," said Dr Mahathir.

On whether he would run for another term, Dr Mahathir said: "Oh yes, obviously, I can only hand over the government after determining what happens at the next elections."

On whether Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who was appointed Deputy Prime Minister early this year, was ready to take over, Dr Mahathir said that "he has done very well.

"But I don't think there is any harm (in) waiting a little to see that he settles down properly.

"At the same moment, things are not quite normal in the country (as) we are preparing for an election and he (Abdullah) is preparing for an election, not on really running the government," Dr Mahathir said.

On how secure Abdullah's position was given the suggestions that his appointment was a stop-gap measure for another minister, Dr Mahathir said: "He is as secure as can be unless something unusual happens."

Hahn also asked whether Dr Mahathir had met certain criteria, including the recovering economy and a capable successor, as prerequisites for calling for an election:

The prime minister said: "As far as the economy is concerned, yes,".

However, he said, the feelings of the people on the ground would also also to be gauged as there was much confusion due to jailed former deputy prime minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim making accusations of a conspiracy against him.

"People who do not know the internal things would presume that there must be some substance to whatever he (Anwar) said," Dr Mahathir said.

Dr Mahathir also dismissed Anwar's claims that his arrest and trial was due to a political conspiracy.

"If there is a political conspiracy in Malaysia, it would have been known by the whole country and the world through the Internet long ago, but here is a case where there was no idea at all that anybody was conspiring against him.

"But the moment he was dismissed from the government, he brought up the charge of conspiracy," he said.

The prime minister said that in Malaysia "nothing is secret, everybody knows what the politicians are thinking even before they start thinking, sometimes".

"You would have heard about the conspiracy may be five months ago, a year ago but there was no such thing," he said.

Dr Mahathir was also asked about the assault on Anwar while in police custody and whether he, as Home Minister then, knew or ordered the beating.

He said he did not know of Anwar's beating after his arrest and neither did he order the beating.

"I am a politician, I have been a fairly successful politician, I would be an idiot to order the beating which would only make me look very bad in the eyes of the whole world and in this country.

"I would not do a stupid thing like that," he said.

The prime minister also said that justice was served in Anwar's first trial.

He said: "I am satisfied that justice was done but of course there is no convincing people who have already made up their minds.

"If he is convicted, then there is no justice, if he is not convicted, then there is justice."

As to whether Anwar's trial had damaged Malaysia's judicial system, he said:

"Well yes and no I would say, because people had already decided he is very popular with them (so) any trial involving him and his conviction would be unfair and that reflects on the judges but the judges and the whole prosecution had done a good job.

"And if they care to read the judge's report which is 380 pages, he (the judge) could not have made up all these things and he had given every reason for decisions that he arrived at," he said.

"But the people who made comments never read even once the basis of judgement, so it is not being fair to the judge who had tried his very best to be fair," the prime minister said.

On whether it was time to review the judicial system, he said that the Malaysian justice system has always been reviewed from time to time.

"If we feel that we were inadequate in any way, we will make amends," he said.

To a question whether it was time for Malaysia to have a Chinese deputy prime minister, Dr Mahathir replied that "the law does not prevent a Chinese becoming even a prime minister, it is for the people to decide."

Asked whether there was any candidate, he said "it depends on the result on the elections.

"For example, if the DAP were to win with an overwhelming majority and all of them are Chinese, obviously they are going to ask for a Chinese prime minister," he said.

To another question whether Malaysia would emulate Indonesia in inviting foreign observers to the next general election, he said: "For them, this is the first free elections, for us we have had elections every five years since independence in 1957.

"We are well-versed in conducting elections although there was a time in 1990 when we did invite Commonwealth observers because there was a lot of accusations against us," he said.

On whether the new opposition Parti Keadilan Nasional (national justice party) led by Anwar's wife, Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Ismail, was a worthy opponent to the ruling party, he said:

"Well, we never take anything casually, we always give due attention and we will see whether there is any credibility or not to their coalition."

When asked whether he was worried about the party and the voices they have with the masses, he said: "I am always worried about the election, not to be worried is really to become too complacent and that would not do for a politician."

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