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Mahathir-Premiership

DR MAHATHIR TO HAND OVER PREMIERSHIP TO HIS DEPUTY

JITRA, May 2 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today confirmed that he will hand over the premiership to Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi after the coming general election, when his deputy is ready.

"Yes, I will hand over after the election. When...you never know. Maybe after one year or two years or three years or four years," he told reporters at the Sultan Abdul Halim Airport, here.

He was asked to comment on a report which appeared in the Mainichi Shimbun, a leading Japanese language daily, on his intention.

The Mainichi Shimbun published its interview with the prime minister in Kuala Lumpur in its Friday edition.

It quoted Dr Mahathir as saying that he would hand over the premiership to Abdullah when his deputy was ready.

Asked how Abdullah would be regarded to be ready, Dr Mahathir said: "We'll have to see...make an evaluation".

In the Japanese daily, Dr Mahathir was quoted as saying that Abdullah had discharged his duties well so far and was popular.

The prime minister was also reported to have said that he felt that Abdullah had the support of the people.

Dr Mahathir said that he did not intend to be prime minister all his life.

"I have no intention of becoming a lifetime prime minister," he said.

He said that many people would not be happy if steps down but on the other hand some people would be happy if he were to step down.

Dr Mahathir said that he was still holding the post as he wanted to deal with the economic problem the country was facing.

"It is because Anwar (former Deputy Prime Minister and former Finance Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim) did not know how to handle the economy," he said.

He said that Anwar's actions in raising interest rates, fixing three months from six months to categorise unserviced loans as non-performing loans and to cut down government expenditure were damaging to the country's economy.

"When I realised that he (Anwar) did not understand the economic problem, I did not step down," he said.

The prime minister said that the policies made by Anwar to tackle the economic problem were introduced without the endorsement of the Cabinet but the Cabinet initially agreed to them as they were made by a member of the Cabinet.

He said that Anwar's action in introducing such measures had actually aided the stock market and currency manipulators.

To another question, Dr Mahathir said that he would not run away from contesting in Kubang Pasu in the coming general election.

"The people here are still giving their support and want me to contest here," he said.

Dr Mahathir holds the Kubang Pasu parliamentary seat since 1974.

-- BERNAMA

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