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Mokhtar-Interview

I AM NOT INDISPENSABLE, SAYS WAN MOKHTAR

By: Azman Ujang

KUALA TERENGGANU, Oct 24 (Bernama) -- Menteri Besar Tan Sri Wan Mokhtar Ahmad said today that he does not consider himself indispensable merely because he has held the post for 25 years.

Wan Mokhtar also dismissed talk that he was providing easy passage for PAS to spread its influence in the oil-rich state by clinging to the post under the notion that only he has the influence to face the opposition in the coming general election.

"No. I do not consider myself indispensable. The question of whether or not I will continue to be Menteri Besar is left to the country's leadership," he said in an interview with Bernama, at his office, here.

He said the question that he had held the Menteri Besar's post for a long time had been turned into an issue by the opposition and also some others who may also be aspiring to become Menteri Besar.

Wan Mokhtar said he had, in 1990, informed Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad that he had been Menteri Besar for four terms and had submitted three names as candidates to replace him.

But, he said, the prime minister wanted him to continue holding the post he has held since 1974, making him the longest serving head of a state government.

Commenting on the talk that he was intent to remain as Menteri Besar to counter the aggressive campaign by PAS to capture the state in the coming general election, Wan Mokhtar said this was also a negative presumption.

"It all depends on the situation. We cannot discuss this matter here because it depends on the leadership. It is up to the prime minister," he said.

Wan Mokhtar said that he had always provided opportunities to the second echelon leaders comprising religious experts and those qualified in other fields, who were trained and entrusted with tasks.

"After having been entrusted with the various tasks, carry them out well and others can make the performance appraisal," he said when asked on the rejuvenation of the state's political leadership.

Wan Mokhtar said that he was also aware of several political leaders in the state aspiring to become Menteri Besar.

Commenting on speculation that PAS would capture Terengganu in the coming general election, he said that the party had been expressing such optimism over the last three or four general elections although this time there was some difference in its campaign in the state.

"From what I see, this time PAS is mobilising several speakers from outside Terengganu to give ceramahs. People no longer listen to those from within the state," he said.

According to him, Terengganu PAS leader Abdul Hadi Awang was a crowd-puller but not anymore.

Wan Mokhtar said that PAS actually did not have issues to shout about except for national issues but the people in the state were not bothered with such issues.

He said that PAS may appear to be strong and influential in Terengganu, but he was certain that PAS would not achieve victory because the party practices a policy which divides the Muslims, clearly against the teachings of Islam.

Wan Mokhtar, who allocates one-fourth of the oil royalty of RM400 million derived by Terengganu annually to provide basic educational

facilities, said that PAS could not be forgiven for regarding the pursuit of knowledge in science and technology as secularism.

Terengganu, with a population of only one million, is a state which provides the highest allocation for education from its own funds apart from the allocation from the federal government.

"Human resource development is my number one priority. Therefore, it is most deceitful for PAS to forbid Muslims to pursue knowledge in science and technology and only seek knowledge in the religious field," he said.

"They only promote the pursuit of religious knowledge, saying that government schools are secular just to win the election and earn a RM3,000 allowance. They would rather see our race disintegrated and the Malays at the losing end. I am certain that God will not let these people achieve victory," he said.

The Menteri Besar said that the state government had to provide a huge allocation for human resource development, especially in producing skilled manpower from the 6,000 students leaving school after completing their SPM each year, to increase the tempo of development rather than depend on federal government allocation.

This is because the federal government has a heavy financial burden and has to allocate an equal amount to the various states.

"For example, only yesterday 10 graduands with SPM qualified as chagemen from the Terengganu Skills Development Centre (Tesdec). These people can earn a monthly salary of RM6,000. This is essential to attract investors to set up industries in the state," he said.

The state government has so far spent RM1.4 billion of the oil royalty specifically to provide basic educational facilities.

"The people have been asking where have the oil royalty we derived gone to...I hope I have answered this question. Actually Terengganu has been lagging behind and does not have basic educational facilities," he said.

Wan Mokhtar also dismissed talk that he was having problems with the Sultan of Terengganu.

Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin succeeded his father, Sultan Mahmud, who died last year.

During Wan Mokhtar's tenure as Menteri Besar, Terengganu has had three Sultans.

"From the time of his grandfather previously, to his late father and the Sultan now, my relationship with the palace remained the same...there are no problems," he said.

Replying to a question, Wan Mokhtar said that Terengganu would continue to observe Friday as its weekend as it did not pose any problem in terms of its dealings or its foreign or international relations.

He said that it had always been the tradition of Muslims in the state to conduct various religious activities on Fridays and this tradition would be preserved.

Terengganu, Kelantan and Kedah are three of the 13 states in Malaysia observing a Friday weekend. The other states observe their weekend on Sunday.

-- BERNAMA

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