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Mahathir-presidency

MAHATHIR WILL DEFEND UMNO PRESIDENCY IF RE-NOMINATED

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 28 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he will defend the Umno presidency if he is re-nominated for the top party post in next year's Umno elections.

"If I'm nominated again for the president's post, I shall defend it," Dr Mahathir said in an interview with Radio Television Malaysia (RTM) at the Prime Minister's Department here today.

Dr Mahathir was asked whether he would defend the post he has held since June 1981.

He was returned unopposed to the Umno presidency in successive party elections since after 1987.

On suggestions by several party leaders that the coming Umno elections be held at the earliest possible time next year, Dr Mahathir said it could be brought forward if the party so desired.

However, Dr Mahathir said, he should abstain from commenting on the possible dates for the upcoming party general assembly as "others could be influenced."

"I prefer to hear the views of all. If they desire something they can voice it out," said the prime minister.

Dr Mahathir said some members might not agree with the suggestion for an early general assembly.

"We must hear (their views) too," he said.

On the emergence of a new generation within Umno that might want to take over the party leadership in future, he said they would definitely take over as the old generation might not be around for long.

However, the transition of power must be done in an organised manner and in accordance with Umno's rules without weakening the party, he said.

"There should not be a scramble, he said.

Dr Mahathir reiterated his request to the Muslims yesterday to be united and to forget their differences.

He said all sorts of allegations and strong language had been used during the Nov 29 general election but now the election was over and it was the fasting month of Ramadan.

"During the fasting month, the Muslims, especially, should practise all the teachings of Islam including closing ranks among themselves," he said.

They should congregate at the mosques for terawih prayers "and in this way we can forget our differences", he said.

He added that they should also not raise matters that could disunite the Muslims in particular.

"This is because even though we may be divided into different political parties, we are still Muslims, and Muslims should unite," he said.

On cooperation between the federal government and the Kelantan and Terengganu state governments led by PAS, Dr Mahathir said the federal government would work with any state government.

"However, as I have said before, it must be reciprocal and not be from just one party. Both parties must want to cooperate," he said.

-- BERNAMA

ES RYN JK