

15/01/1999

Dr M: I'll hand over duties in smooth transition

Ashraf Abdullah

KOTA BARU, Thurs. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today he would hand over his duties as Prime Minister to his deputy in a smooth transition of power when he is ready to retire.

Dr Mahathir said upon his retirement and barring unforeseen circumstances, his deputy (Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi) would succeed him as Prime Minister.

"Yes, there will be a smooth transition of power. I can assure you.

"Barring unforeseen circumstances, I will hand over my duties to my deputy before retiring," he said after a closed-door meeting with Barisan Nasional State Assemblymen at Rumah Sri Kelantan.

Dr Mahathir, who is Umno president and Kelantan Umno liaison committee chief, had earlier met State Umno leaders to discuss preparations for the general election which is due by June next year.

"We (in the BN) believe that we can win the election and form the Government," he said.

Asked whether he was preparing to relinquish his power by handing over some of his duties to others, Dr Mahathir said:

"I don't have power. I just want some more time for the party. To be frank with you, I was expecting Datuk Seri Anwar (Ibrahim) to take over as Prime Minister.

"So I gave him the opportunity to go around the country and meet the rakyat. I stayed back and did not want to go for State visits. I thought I was on the way out," he said.

But Dr Mahathir said following recent developments he felt that he had to have contact with the people again.

"To do that, I need more time. If I am stuck with the Finance Ministry and Home Ministry, I will not have time," he said.

Asked whether this was a confirmation that Abdullah would take over as Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir said: "Sometimes we confirm, but events prevent us from carrying it out. It is not my fault."

Dr Mahathir said when Datuk Musa Hitam (now Tan Sri) was his deputy, he had thought that he would succeed him but he chose to resign.

Similarly, he said, Ghafar Baba (now Tun) could not succeed him because he was defeated by Anwar.

"And now Anwar has a problem. This is beyond me. Man proposes, God disposes," Dr Mahathir said.

He added that as far as he could foresee, his deputy would succeed him.

"We never know what will happen. But I have a duty to ensure that the country's stability is returned and that the economy continues to grow. Then I will retire. I am not going to be here forever. I am already 74," he said.

(END)