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DPM: New MB likely from list

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today the new Selangor Menteri Besar is likely to be picked from the list of names submitted by the State Umno liaison committee to the Prime Minister.

As all of the candidates proposed were Assemblymen, he said there was no need then to hold any by-election to fill the State's top post.

However, Abdullah said the final decision would be the prerogative of party president and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who received the list of names today from Selangor Umno.

He said this when asked whether Umno and Barisan Nasional were now prepared to hold a by-election in the event that the candidate nominated for the Menteri Besar's post was not an Assemblyman.

Speculation has been rife that besides several senior Assemblymen, "outsiders" like former Menteri Besar and State deputy liaison chief Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib and Deputy Finance Minister Datuk Dr Shafie Salleh might be picked to succeed Datuk Seri Abu Hassan Omar.

Abu Hassan resigned yesterday, citing health reasons and the need to devote more time to his family.

But the only drawback to appointing Muhammad or Shafie is that neither one of them is a member of the State Legislative Assembly, hence the need to hold a by-election if either one is chosen as Menteri Besar.

Abdullah was speaking at a Press conference after attending a briefing for Umno divisional leaders Dr Mahathir at the Putra World Trade Centre.

"At this moment, we have no plans to initiate any move which would necessitate the holding of a by-election.

"It is not necessary and God willing, from the names submitted, one of them would be picked as MB."

Asked whether Abu Hassan would need to clear the allegations surrounding him, Abdullah said there was no need for this.

Asked whether Abu Hassan should clear his name of the allegation of fathering a child with his sister-in-law, Abdullah said he could not comment as the matter had not been verified.

"As I do not know the issue in detail, I cannot say much.

"These rumours are being propagated by certain quarters," he said.

Abdullah also thanked Abu Hassan for all the services rendered during his tenure as Menteri Besar.

Approached by reporters earlier, Muhammad said that his name was not among the list of potential candidates submitted to Dr Mahathir.

"I did not fulfil the criteria (set by the State liaison committee) ... so my name is not included," he said.

"We have submitted the list to the Prime Minister and it is up to him to decide.

"He will scrutinise the list and make the announcement."

On who proposed the names and the selection criteria, Muhammad said these had been decided by the State liaison committee which held a special meeting yesterday to discuss Abu Hassan's resignation and his possible successor.

He added the committee also informed Dr Mahathir the selection criteria agreed upon by the committee where the candidates chosen should be an elected representative as well as Umno division chiefs or acting division heads.

On the willingness of Batang Kali Assemblyman Datuk Zainal Abidin Sakom to vacate his seat for Muhammad to contest in a by-election, Muhammad dismissed it as mere speculations.

On whether he was willing to assume the Menteri Besar's post he vacated in 1997 if picked by Dr Mahathir, he said: "The question does not arise now."

Meanwhile, Zainal Abidin, who was Muhammad's former political secretary, reiterated his willingness to "make way" for his former boss to contest.

He said Muhammad would have no problem winning the seat which he (Zainal Abidin) won by a majority of more than 5,000 votes in the 1999 general election.

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