

18/02/2000

Dr M: Not true I don't mind contest for No 2 (HL)

Sarban Singh; Abdul Razak Ahmad

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today dismissed claims that he did not wish to see a contest against him as Umno President but would not mind a fight for the deputy presidency.

Dr Mahathir said: "I'm extremely saddened by these claims. It seems that I'm out to protect myself, and that I'm open where the post of deputy president is concerned.

"This is definitely not my intention. It (the no-contest advice) comes from the supreme council and as a member of the supreme council, I'm also bound by it.

"The council gives the advice that the posts of president and deputy president not be contested... this means that the advice also comes from me," he told reporters after chairing a three-hour Umno supreme council meeting at the party headquarters.

Asked if he was aware that a section of the grassroots wanted to see a contest for the post of deputy president, Dr Mahathir said he was aware of it.

Giving a historical perspective to this, Dr Mahathir said when he was appointed Deputy Prime Minister by the late Tun Hussein Onn, he remained a vice-president but was accorded treatment due a deputy president, a situation not dissimilar to that of Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

"When the party elections came, I was the sole candidate and became the deputy president," he said.

Dr Mahathir was also asked to comment on a newspaper report which said that Kelantan Umno liaison committee chairman Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah would not contest either of the two top posts in the May party elections.

The Prime Minister said: "We welcome his decision. Tengku Razaleigh sits in the supreme council... and the council was unanimous when it made its decision that the two top posts should not be contested," he said.

The Utusan Malaysia today reported that Tengku Razaleigh, the MP for Gua Musang, would not contest the two posts, adding that rumours to the contrary were spread by irresponsible people.

On Umno's possible entry into Sarawak, Dr Mahathir said the party had no intention of doing so for now.

"Although we find that there is some benefit in this, we feel this is not the right time.

"If we go into Sarawak, it will only be to strengthen the Barisan Nasional and not to cause disunity among BN components," he said.

Dr Mahathir said, as such, the supreme council would neither endorse nor recognise any branch set up in Sarawak.

Last Saturday, former Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu deputy president Datuk Abang Abu Bakar Mustapha said he was leading efforts to bring Umno to Sarawak.

Dr Mahathir said: "We do not recognise his efforts."

Asked whether he had informed Abang Abu Bakar of the party's decision, Dr Mahathir said he had written a letter to the chairman of a rally which had been planned for Feb 27.

"I told him that we will not recognise (the branches)... we do not intend to go to Sarawak and that there should not be any such gathering."

On whether attempts to bring Umno into Sarawak could jeopardise ties between the Federal Government and Sarawak, he said it would not because both sides enjoyed good relations.

Dr Mahathir also denied an Utusan Malaysia report which appeared last week claiming that Division One civil servants could be active in politics.

Dr Mahathir said today's meeting also discussed ways to strengthen the party, the on-going campaigns and branch elections.

"We are glad that the campaigning and branch elections are not so intense," he said.

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