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Stop making claims, says Dr M

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Candidates vying for positions in the upcoming Umno divisional elections next month have been urged to stop making claims that their candidacy is being endorsed by top party leaders.

Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir, making this call today, said a candidate had even gone to the extent of claiming that his (Dr Mahathir's) wife, Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, was favouring the aspirant.

"Some say that they are supposedly the president's 'candidate' while others say that they are endorsed by the president through 'mama' which is my wife ... I did not know my wife was called that," Dr Mahathir told a Press conference after chairing the party's supreme council meeting at the party headquarters here.

Dr Mahathir said Umno does not want candidates to claim that they are being sanctioned by anyone, whether by him, party deputy president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi or other top leaders.

"If they become candidates, their election depends on their own merit, not because they are being sanctioned or nominated by the president or any other party."

Later asked on the action which would be taken against such candidates, Dr Mahathir said complaints against them would be investigated and action taken in due course.

Dr Mahathir also advised party members holding Government positions to refrain from contesting divisional elections.

But he said division committee members who already hold positions in Government could regard their posts in the party as their right.

However, Dr Mahathir said it was not Umno's policy that members with Government positions must also hold posts in the divisions.

Asked whether there were other complaints other than members claiming to have been endorsed by top party leaders, Dr Mahathir said they mainly involved allegations of money politics.

On the question of the rotation of the Sabah Chief Minister's post, Dr Mahathir said he would take into consideration the interests of the people of Sabah and the State's development in deciding the matter.

Another criterion for determining whether to continue with the current system of rotation would be the Sabah Barisan Nasional component parties' interests.

The Prime Minister said he was still awaiting reports in writing from BN component party leaders in Sabah on the matter.

"I will make a decision (on the rotation system) as soon as possible," he said.

Dr Mahathir did not specify whether the decision would be made before Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Osu Sukam's term ends on March 13.

"He took an oath of office (as Chief Minister) but it is not limited to exactly two years, it is no problem if the term is a little longer."

Dr Mahathir said he had met all Sabah BN component party leaders and had asked them to submit reports on the rotation system.

He also briefed the council on the party's agenda for the proposed Malay unity talks with Pas.

The council unanimously gave the mandate for Dr Mahathir and the Umno political bureau to continue efforts to hold the talks.

He also explained to the council that the opposition was exploiting the unity talks for political mileage, linking it to the Malay Action Front's

"Takkan Melayu Hilang di Dunia" gathering last month.

Dr Mahathir said several Pas and Parti Keadilan Nasional leaders had portrayed the unity talks as an anti-Chinese move.

On a Bernama report today quoting Pas secretary-general Nasharudin Mat Isa as saying that Pas wanted to discuss the right of assembly during the proposed talks in addition to the four issues they earlier announced - which related to the judiciary, economy, religion and federalism - Dr Mahathir said:

"We are willing to discuss anything, though we may not necessarily agree."

Dr Mahathir said Umno's desire to discuss Malay unity - in terms of protecting Malay rights, the position of the national language, religion and maintaining the status of the Malay Rulers as Constitutional monarchs - had no inter-party political implications.

"As such I'm sure Pas as a Malay party would surely want to defend these rights like we do. On the right of assembly, we can discuss it also."

On another report today also quoting Nasharudin saying that Pas was willing to meet with the Umno president informally at Parliament House when its next session begins on March 19 to discuss Malay issues, Dr Mahathir said any place was agreeable to him.

"For us, the place is not important ... just let us know and we will meet. I will cancel all my programmes if they want to meet, I will not go anywhere."

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