

Abdullah to carry out PM's duties

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Dr Mahathir will be away for a month

PUTRAJAYA, Fri. Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi will carry out the duties of the Prime Minister during the month that Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is away.

"We call it carrying out the duties of the Prime Minister," the Prime Minister said when asked whether Abdullah had been appointed acting Prime Minister.

On whether the appointment was official, Dr Mahathir, who will be on leave until the end of the month, said: "He is acting ... so unofficially, he is acting Prime Minister."

Pressed whether Abdullah could be referred to as the acting Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir said unlike some other people, he was not too concerned with protocol.

Former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim served as acting Prime Minister for two months in 1997 when Dr Mahathir took leave.

On Abdullah's appointment as acting Finance Minister, Dr Mahathir, who is also the Finance Minister, said someone had to carry out his duties while he was away.

"This is necessary.

"If something happens (that needs the attention of the Finance Minister), then don't tell me you

will start looking for me."

Dr Mahathir was also asked about the possibility of Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah being deregistered following the dispute which led to the election of two presidents last week. The Prime Minister said the Registrar of Societies had the right to take such an action if the party had violated the law.

"However, we have to study whether any laws have been breached.

"But this matter is political, so we must be careful because sometimes there are people who use the law to achieve their political aims."

On another matter, Dr Mahathir said it was vital to fully utilise the RM7.3 billion stimulus package announced last year in the next two months. This was to stimulate the economy further.

The full amount should have been spent by Dec 31, but only 60 to 70 per cent had been used.

At the time, Dr Mahathir had attributed the failure to red tape and bureaucracy.

Asked now whether he was satisfied with the amount spent so far, Dr Mahathir quipped: "I am never satisfied but it (the amount spent) is quite all right."

Later, Dr Mahathir left for New

York to attend the World Economic Forum (WEF) and Malaysian Investment Summit.

According to **Bernama**, the Prime Minister, accompanied by wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali took a Malaysia Airlines commercial flight to London at the KL International Airport at 11.55pm en route to New York.

Dr Mahathir is among several world leaders who will speak at WEF meeting which started on Thursday and ends on Monday.

He will deliver his keynote address at the MIS, jointly organised by Salomon Smith Barney, Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute (Asli) and the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange.

The other speakers include Bank Negara governor Tan Sri Dr Zeti Akhtar Aziz, Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange chairman Datuk Mohd Azlan Hashim and Penang Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon.

After his stay in New York, Dr Mahathir is expected to go to Antarctica for a six-day working visit as part of his month-long holiday.

He is expected to return home on Feb 28.