

No coup brewing in Kelantan Umno, says Dr M

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SHAH ALAM: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has denied reports that a coup is brewing in Kelantan Umno, saying it was mere speculation.

He said none of the 12 leaders said to be planning the overthrow of state Umno head Datuk Mustapa Mohamed had informed him about their move to replace Mustapa.

"I am not aware of such a thing. Maybe they feel it is better to inform the press than to inform party leaders," the Umno president and Prime Minister said at a press conference after opening the Selangor Barisan Nasional convention at the Selangor Youth and Cultural Complex here yesterday.

An English newspaper, quoting sources, had reported that the 12 of 14 Umno division heads in Kelantan were seeking to replace all the office bearers in the Kelantan Umno liaison committee, headed by Mustapa, who is Umno national information chief and National Economic Action Committee (NEAC) executive director.

The paper reported that the 12 had decided that as long as the current office bearers held their positions, Kelantan Umno would not loosen PAS' grip on the state.

Asked if there was a need to change the state leadership, Dr Mahathir said: "No leader is permanent. Even I was thrown out as Kelantan Umno chief and replaced by Tengku Razaleigh (Hamzah).

"After Razaleigh quit the post, Mustapa was appointed."

Pasir Mas Umno division head Datuk Ibrahim Ali, who was cited as one of those

being considered to take over from Mustapa, said he was not happy to be dragged into the issue.

Although he admitted that all was not smooth in Kelantan Umno, he said there was no concerted effort among the division heads to pressure Mustapa to resign.

"What happened was some of us decided to organise a dinner to discuss the malady afflicting Kelantan Umno. I didn't know anything about it until I was invited.

"We were quite candid when we discussed the problems and how to overcome them.

"Somebody told the gathering that Mustapa had met Dr Mahathir and asked to be replaced as he could not devote all of his time to Kelantan because of his work in the NEAC and as Umno information chief.

"Someone then suggested Tengku Razaleigh and my name as possible replacement," he said.

Ibrahim said whatever took place that night was never conducted in the tone suggested by the newspaper.

Tengku Razaleigh, who is Gua Musang division chief, on Thursday evening had expressed surprise about a so-called letter that Mustapa had supposedly written to Dr Mahathir to convey his decision to step down.

Peringat Umno chief Datuk Annuar Musa, when contacted by *The Star*, declined to comment on the matter, saying that he needed "to consult with his friends first."

Met by *The Star* after chairing his division meeting here in the afternoon, Mustapa declined comment.