

05 JUL 2002

Mahathir-Najib

DR MAHATHIR ONLY HINTING THAT NAJIB MAY BECOME DPM

JITRA, July 5 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that he was only hinting that Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak may become the deputy prime minister when he steps down as prime minister.

He said it was up to Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, his anointed successor, to choose his deputy and form his own cabinet line-up when he became prime minister.

He said this when asked to comment on his statement on Tuesday that Najib, who is Umno vice-president, may become deputy prime minister when Abdullah takes over the helm of the government.

He was speaking at a media conference after laying the foundation stone for the Kubang Pasu district administration complex at 13th Mile, Jalan Changlun, near here.

Asked whether he endorsed Najib as deputy prime minister, Dr Mahathir said: "Let's say I have no objections."

Asked whether he would tell this to the other Umno members, he said: "I'm telling you now."

Asked how the other vice-presidents would react to this open endorsement, Dr Mahathir said: "I don't know who will be chosen as deputy, either Najib or anybody else, but they have given an undertaking that they would not go around and try to pull down each other."

He said that under Umno's system, when a president stepped down, his successor would become acting president while in the government, when the prime minister stepped down, the person leading the biggest party in the government would be the prime minister.

Dr Mahathir said the person picked by Abdullah to be the deputy prime minister would normally become acting Umno deputy president.

"That's what happened to me and I believe that the tradition will go on," he added.

To another question, he said he did not know who would be leading the Barisan Nasional (BN) in the next general election but gave an assurance that he would continue to work to ensure the victory of BN candidates.

On the Pendang parliamentary and Anak Bukit state by-elections on July 18, he said he had seen the list of BN candidates and a decision would be made later.

The prime minister hoped that the BN supporters would be courteous in their campaigning for the two seats.

"We don't want to resort to reviling, cursing or name-calling," he said.

On his two day-visit to Thailand beginning today, he said it was to foster bilateral relations between the two countries.

He said the discussions would focus on the development of the joint gas utilisation project and development in the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand growth triangle.

-- BERNAMA

JM MSL HS JK