

30/03/2002

Dr M to get views of division heads

Ramlan Said

SHAH ALAM, Fri. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said he would ask the 12 Kelantan Umno division heads whether they wanted a leadership change in the State party line-up, adding they should bring their grievances to him rather than going to the Press.

Asked to comment on a front-page report in the New Straits Times of a coup brewing in Kelantan Umno, the Prime Minister and party president said he was not aware that the group had reached a consensus on the matter.

"I don't know. I have to ask these 12 division heads. They did not inform me."

Dr Mahathir said it was beyond his control if they chose the Press instead of Umno leaders to voice their grievances.

"They give more importance to the Press, not their leaders," he said after opening the Selangor Barisan Nasional Convention 2002 here. Quoting sources, the NST report said 12 of the 14 division heads in Kelantan wanted the party's State leaders to be replaced.

They collectively agreed the office bearers were ineffective and as long as the current office bearers held their positions, Kelantan Umno would not be able to put a dent on Pas' grip on the State.

The office bearers are chairman Datuk Mustapa Mohamed, secretary Datuk Ahmad Rusli Ibrahim, treasurer Datuk Dr Nik Hussain Abdul Rahman, information chief Mohd Noor Deris and executive secretary Mohd Nawawi Yaacob.

Dr Mahathir, who described the report as speculation, however said no leader held his post permanently, noting that some were ineffective.

"I was once replaced as Kelantan Umno chief by Tengku Razaleigh (Hamzah) and when he quit, Mustapa took over."

Dr Mahathir said one could not expect Mustapa to hold his post for life.

"When I was the head, I also could not stand it. I was removed because I failed (to wrest Kelantan from Pas)."

Asked whether this could be taken as a hint that Mustapa would be replaced, Dr Mahathir said he did not mean it that way.

"I am not hinting that way. What I am saying is that no leader is permanent."

On whether changes could be expected in the State soon, Dr Mahathir said he had no idea about it.

Dr Mahathir also said efforts to enhance race relations, including having a single political party to represent everyone, should be carried out gradually as any sudden change could result in disaster.

He said the measures taken should be suited to the principles and needs of the various ethnic groups.

"If we force them to do something, it will not remain effective for long. Eventually it will disintegrate," he told a Press conference after opening the Selangor Barisan Nasional Convention 2002 at the Section 7 Kompleks Belia here.

Dr Mahathir, who is BN chairman, was asked to elaborate on his speech that more time was needed before BN could become a single party instead of a coalition.

He was also asked why targets set by the Government, like on Bumiputera equity, failed to be achieved.

"We did not anticipate the lack of co-operation on the part of so many people wanting to become rich quickly. That's why we have not been able to

achieve our target. We give something to them like shares but these are sold to others."

Earlier, tracing the history of the establishment of BN, which started as Perikatan before independence, the Prime Minister said various political and economic measures to bring the various races closer were carried out gradually by the Government.

In economy, the New Economic Policy and a host of other programmes were introduced to reduce the disparity among the various races.

The objective was to avoid suspicions and jealousy which could erupt into racial tension and strife if a wide economic gap continued to exist among the races.

In politics, the Government, though dominated by Umno, was represented by all the major races through the spirit of tolerance and willingness to share power, a principle founded by Perikatan.

ramlans@nstp.com.my

(END)