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PM thankful to all who have supported BN

FULL transcript of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's Press conference in Alor Star.

Q: Looking at the support shown to you after returning to Kedah, how do you feel?

A: I'm thankful. Normally when someone remains in office too long, people start to detest or become bored with that person. However, it doesn't look that way and I'm glad. I would also like to thank all my supporters in Kubang Pasu, Kedah and the whole country. Actually the strength of the Government depends on such support. The Government also gains legitimacy if there is strong support. Without the people's support, we cannot form an authoritative Government which can develop the country. That is why the people's support is invaluable and I'm thankful to all who have supported Barisan Nasional and also me since 1974.

Q: It's very clear the people in Kubang Pasu support you and want you to remain. They want to hear it from you to say you'll remain even after the next general election.

A: After the general election I won't know but I know I'll remain until I finish my term. When there is a general election then we'll think about it. There is still a lot of time.

Q: Will you lead BN in the next general election?

A: I don't know if I'll lead. Whoever is the leader at that time will lead but I'll work to ensure BN gets a resounding victory.

Q: Datuk Seri, you've indicated Datuk Seri Najib Razak could be the next Deputy Prime Minister. Does it mean that Najib is the person of your choice as Deputy Prime Minister and Deputy Umno President?

A: In Umno's system, when the president withdraws, his replacement will become acting president ... That is at Umno's level. At the Government level, when the Prime Minister withdraws, the person who leads the biggest party, that is Barisan Nasional, will become the Prime Minister. So, when I withdraw Pak Lah will become the Prime Minister.

It is up to Datuk Seri Abdullah to form the Government, to choose his Cabinet. With regard to the (Umno) Deputy President, that will be decided by the party. But whoever is chosen by Pak Lah as Deputy Prime Minister usually becomes the acting Deputy President. That was what happened to me and I am confident that this practice is good. I was only implying that maybe Najib could become deputy when I withdraw. But this would depend on Pak Lah as the Prime Minister to choose who will become his deputy.

Q: Are you endorsing Najib as the Deputy Prime Minister?

A: Let's say I have no objections.

Q: Would you make it known to Umno members that you have no objections to Najib being appointed as DPM?

A: Well, I'm telling you already.

Q: Do you plan to appoint a Finance Minister?

A: I'm thinking about it ... any applicants? ... We'll consider.

Q: What about candidates for the by-elections?

A: We will announce when the time comes. Now, we are evaluating.

Q: How many candidates are there in the proposed list?

A: There are many ... 10,15, 20 people. If there are people interested, they can write to me.

Q: Have you seen the list?

A: I have seen but I cannot reveal ... it's a party secret ... Pak Lah

will make the announcement. Whether I make or someone else, I must sign ... To give the credential to that person.

Q: Back to Najib ... How do you think other Umno vice-presidents will react to this?

A: I don't know ... whoever is chosen, whether Najib or anybody, they have given an undertaking there will be no (power) struggle.

Q: Open endorsement wouldn't it ...

A: It's the same whether its open or close or whatever, they won't go round trying to pull down each other.

Q: How will the by-election result affect the next general election?

A: Don't know ... but I am of the opinion that the rakyat now have changed their stand. They are supporting Umno and the Government more and this would be seen everywhere.

The effects of past events have gone because people who strongly opposed us then have returned ... (they) no longer oppose us and (they have) returned to Umno and the Government because they now believe we do not have any ill-intention.

We only followed the country's laws. They always demand we have rule of law but when the rule of law is imposed on them, they want this. This is not right. I myself will accept that laws be imposed on me if I had contravened the laws. I will not evade because I am the Prime Minister or anything.

Q: The Opposition may carry out a campaign to smear you and Pak Lah. Would you take action and what is your advice to the election machinery so that they will not become emotional and regarding your trip to Bangkok, what do you hope to achieve?

A: Firstly, we want the BN campaign to be orderly and according to our culture. We do not like to see people hurling abuses to others, uttering profanities, say bad things about other people or calling them names. That will not be done by Umno and BN, we hope the Opposition will also not do that. We will contest in a gentlemanly manner and whoever the rakyat choose, we will accept.

On the visit to Bangkok, it is a normal practice that once the Thai Prime Minister visits us, I will reciprocate the visit. We want to bring closer our relations with Thailand. There are several minor problems which need to be resolved including the gas pipeline from the Joint Development Area and also to ensure co-operation under the IMTGT (Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle) framework becomes more effective and also on several other matters.

Q: If you were to unpeg the ringgit, the ringgit will depreciate right now. In your last 16 months in the Government, do you think you will make some changes to the ringgit peg?

A: That shows that people were wrong. When the value of the ringgit is low, exchange rate high, people would ask to devalue the ringgit, now they ask to increase it, if we follow other people's advice, it would become like a yo-yo. Up one moment and down another moment. It would be difficult for people to do business. That's why we are serious about our ringgit, we had it pegged. If the values of other currencies increase, it is okay, we can do business, our exports are still good.