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Mahathir-Najib

NAJIB MOST QUALIFIED, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

By: Zulkefli Salleh

BANGKOK, July 7 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that he sees Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak as the most qualified candidate, and the most senior and experienced in the government, to be appointed deputy prime minister.

The prime minister said his purpose in hinting that the defence minister might be appointed to the post at a meeting with the Kubang Pasu Umno committee members last Wednesday was not to "bind" his deputy, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, to pick Najib when he (Dr Mahathir) retired.

"Its not to bind, my aim is that there should be no tussle (for the post), and as Najib is the most senior...I see in this case the best candidate in terms of seniority and most experienced in the government is Najib," he told Malaysian journalists here before leaving for home after a two-day visit to Thailand.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president, was asked to clarify his statement made at the meeting with the Kubang Pasu Umno representative and whether it was binding on Abdullah in his choice of a deputy.

The prime minister has named Abdullah as his successor when he steps down after October next year.

Dr Mahathir said it was up to Abdullah to choose any one of the Umno leaders to be the deputy prime minister.

On the post of acting deputy Umno president, Dr Mahathir said he was not sure what was written in the party constitution on the matter but in his own case, when he was appointed deputy prime minister, he was also appointed acting deputy Umno president until he was endorsed at the party elections.

"I don't know if the process is not contained in the Umno constitution and is only our practice, I don't want to know...it's the duty of the prospective president, it's up to him," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said that under the plan for the transition of power, the Umno supreme council had agreed to hold the party elections, scheduled for next year, only after the general election to prevent any disruption in the latter.

Asked about his retirement plans, he said he planned to write about his experiences in the political, economic and social spheres to share them with others.

He also planned to speak at various fora and be sort of a spokesman for the many good ideas in Malaysia that needed to be given publicity.

-- BERNAMA

ZS JK