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Dr M speaks of relief of being a pensioner

Balan Moses; Ramlan Said; Lim Chee Wei

MINGGUAN Malaysia yesterday carried an exclusive interview with Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the first given by the former Prime Minister since retiring on Oct 31.

In the wide-ranging interview at his home at the Mines Resort City, he spoke, among others, on the performance of his successor Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, his failure to change the attitude of the Malays, terrorism and his plans after Hari Raya.

The first question asked by the paper's journalists was his feelings as a pensioner.

Dr Mahathir said: "It is a relief as I no longer have to be forced to do wrong things, like people wanting to use my office for personal gain, to get contracts and so on.

"I can't do all that, it is wrong but when I do not entertain such requests, people get angry. Some even refused to talk to me."

Admitting he was sometimes pressured by such requests, Dr Mahathir said people mistakenly thought that as Prime Minister, he could grant everything they wanted.

"Actually, I can't give anything, there are procedures to be followed and verification carried out by officers. The most I can do is be a post-man ...hand over the requests to the officers in charge.

"I do not instruct them to approve or reject, it is up to them to decide and they know my stand. But when applications are rejected, I become the victim. Some even claimed that I had agreed but other people objected."

Dr Mahathir said his duty now was to support the new Prime Minister. Noting the wide support pledged by all quarters to Abdullah, Dr Mahathir was confident the Prime Minister would be able to provide excellent leadership.

Dr Mahathir was asked whether he encountered any difficulty in selecting the Deputy Prime Minister when he took over as Prime Minister.

He said as the Umno election was near then, he waited for delegates to elect a new deputy president, who was later made Deputy Prime Minister.

Meanwhile, Berita Minggu quoted Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Abdul Hamid Zainal Abidin as advising Malaysian pilgrims not to participate in unhealthy activities while they were in Mecca for the haj.

"They are also forbidden from carrying flags of political parties or distributing pamphlets which are propaganda in nature."

However, while in groups, pilgrims were allowed to carry the Jalur Gemilang for identification purposes.

In another story, the paper reported the Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Ministry would continue to act on information passed to it by 14,000 price watch volunteers, who were mostly housewives.

Enforcement chief Abdullah Nawawi Mohamed said the volunteers had been active in assisting the ministry detect errant traders.

Based on the information of the volunteers, the ministry had taken action against 10 traders for over-pricing and failure to display price tags.