

02/01/2003

Dr Mahathir: No power struggle

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said he was confident there will be no power struggle in Umno when he retires in October and succeeded by his deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Dr Mahathir, who is Umno president, said the question of who takes over as the Deputy Prime Minister from Abdullah would be settled in due course.

Umno, he said, had faced a power struggle in the past when he was challenged for the presidency but the party would not allow such contests to recur.

"As far as I know, there is no problem on the question of transition of power. Everything will proceed smoothly. There is wide support among the Umno grassroots and the Barisan Nasional component parties for Abdullah."

Dr Mahathir said this at a Press conference after attending a New Year open house hosted by People's Progressive Party president Datuk M. Kayveas at the Putra World Trade Centre.

He was asked to comment on a statement by Opposition leader Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang yesterday that Dr Mahathir's decision to relinquish all his political posts in October would create a power struggle in Umno.

Hadi, who is Pas acting president and Terengganu Menteri Besar, said he hoped the problem in Umno would not affect the country's stability.

"Hadi can make his prediction and perhaps it is his hope to see a power struggle in Umno. But this is just wishful thinking on his part. I cannot read his mind on why he made such a statement."

Asked what he hoped to achieve in the next 10 months before resigning, Dr Mahathir replied: "Nothing much ... just to continue working as usual."

As for his New Year resolution, Dr Mahathir said:

"I hope to see Malaysia continue to progress and that the BN component parties maintain discipline and unity."

Dr Mahathir was also asked on the allegation by Pas member Razak Abas that Puteri Umno members were paid to accuse him of lifting his sarong and exposing his genitals during campaigning for the Anak Bukit by-election in July.

"Now we know what we must do when faced with such cases. We must first take the sarong so that it can be used as an evidence although this will lead to the person being naked.

"I do not know how the sarong can be used as an evidence that the

person

lifted his sarong. There must be a reason why the court made such a decision simply because the prosecution failed to produce the sarong."

The Alor Star magistrate court on Dec 26 acquitted Razak. Magistrate Mohd Redzuan Abdullah said the decision was based on several factors, including the failure of the police to seize the sarong which Razak allegedly wore when he exposed himself.

To a question on the BN supreme council meeting next Tuesday, Dr Mahathir said they would discuss party matters, including MCA's indefinite

suspension of its two Penang State Assembly members.

"I will raise the matter during the meeting so that a decision can be reached on the fate of the duo."

Lim Boo Chang (Datuk Keramat) and Tan Cheng Liang (Jawi) were suspended by the MCA presidential council on Dec 16 for abstaining from voting against a motion tabled by the Opposition seeking to defer the RM1.02 billion Penang Outer Ring Road project at the State Legislative Assembly on Nov 21.

Meanwhile, BN secretary Tan Sri Mohamed Rahmat said the meeting would discuss whether MCA's action against the duo was sufficient.

"Although MCA had acted against the duo, BN still has to ensure such incidents will not be repeated in future."

He said MCA must explain what actually happened and clarify its definition of indefinite suspension taken against the duo.

"They are BN Assembly members and are not merely representing MCA. BN has a say regarding the action to be taken against them," he said, when met at the function.

Mohamed said the meeting would also discuss the need to amend the BN constitution to provide it with more power to act against any misconduct by State assembly members.

"This is necessary as currently only the component parties can take action against their members while BN has no jurisdiction," he said.

Mohamed said the amendment would also include party hopping to ensure that such action would not strain the relationship among BN component parties.

"We feel there is a need to amend the constitution as the last major amendment was in 1974. Things then were different from the problems which we are facing today."

Mohamed said the meeting would also discuss the membership application submitted by Sarawak Progressive Democratic Party (SPDP), which is the splinter party of the now defunct Sarawak National Party (SNAP).