

13/01/2003

Shafie: Zainal can be life adviser

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SEREMBAN, Sun. - Deputy Malaysian Trades Union Congress president Mohamed Shafie B.P. Mammal today said MTUC president Datuk Zainal Rampak will be appointed life adviser if he steps down gracefully.

"He is a man with vast experience and if he steps down with dignity, I do not mind appointing him as life adviser. This is because I want Zainal to be remembered and respected for his contributions."

Shafie said he would also organise a grand farewell reception for Zainal if the latter kept his word.

"I will invite our Prime Minister (Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad) and as many union leaders as possible to attend the reception and to talk about Zainal who has done a lot for MTUC."

Shafie, who will be leaving for Mecca tomorrow, said Zainal should have told him in person if he intended to stay as MTUC president for a full term until 2004.

"Come and see me or call me so that we can discuss. If he says, 'Shafie, I have lots of work to be done and give me one more year', I will be ever willing to accept it. If he wants to serve until 2004, then say so."

Shafie also said that he would agree to "power sharing" if Zainal proposed it.

"If he says he wants to remain as president for another one year and I take another one year before 2004, I can also accept this. At least, I have the time to improve myself and plan to strengthen MTUC further. But he is not going to do this."

Shafie said he would fight for the president's post in 2004 when Zainal's term expires. "I believe other people in MTUC will also be fighting for the post."

He said he would be away in Mecca for about 44 days. "In my absence, I hope Zainal can find a solution to this controversy. For me, I will try to forget about this issue the moment I step on the plane as I want to concentrate on my pilgrimage."

He said claims he was going on pilgrimage because he was disappointed he could not be the MTUC president were untrue. "I planned this a long time ago. Once I return we will see what we can do."

Shafie also said there was no point in negotiations as Zainal had said he would continue as MTUC president until 2004. "Furthermore, I do not have a formula."

Shafie said the controversy had caused him and MTUC in general much embarrassment. "I am ashamed. Much has been said and reported about us and MTUC has become a laughing stock."

He said at his age, Zainal, 63, should be grooming young people as union leaders and not be embroiled in controversies.

Asked about taking the matter to court, Shafie said: "I am not going to do this. I do not want to be the champion in this matter ...Zainal is still my friend."