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DR M: I HEARD OF PLOT AGAINST ME

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'But I do not take heed of it'

KUALA LUMPUR

PRIME Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad says he is aware of a supposed plot to topple him.

But he said he chose not to be bothered about it.

"I heard about it, but I do not take heed of it," he said when asked about the backdoor dealings and tussle for power, during his official visit to Bangkok yesterday.

Observers see his statement as lending credence to talks of a tussle between Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia and PKR. One is in support of Dr Mahathir, while the other is said to be pushing to fast-track the leadership transition to his successor, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Word about these two factions surfaced in recent months, but the political play that has been the fodder for insiders of both parties has grown louder in recent weeks.

This is compounded by the defection of Barisan Nasional lawmakers and the many who opted out of Umno.

Having declared their support for Dr Mahathir, insiders have said it is just a matter of time before the 11 partyless members of parliament get the nod to be PPBM members.

In *Jerlun*, PPBM deputy president Datuk Seri Mukhriz Mahathir denied such a plot existed.

"It's not true. We are committed to Pakatan Harapan based on the agreement that all of us signed during its inception. We will fulfil this (agreement)."

He was referring to PH's decision prior to the 14th General Election to name Dr Mahathir as prime minister if it won.

In an exclusive interview with the New Straits Times Press on Saturday, former Umno leader Datuk Seri Hamzah Zainuddin said 36 Barisan Nasional MPs had signed a letter of support for Dr Mahathir last month.

They reportedly comprised 33 MPs from Umno, one from Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah and two from MIC.

Hamzah had said that the 36 MPs were "sincere in their intentions to ensure that the current government is stable" and wanted to "make sure there are no quarters trying to use Parliament to topple the prime minister as we heard of such rumours".

An Umno divisional leader yesterday claimed that Hamzah was leading a faction in support of Dr Mahathir and trying to derail a smooth transition of power to Anwar.

Umno Supreme Council member Datuk Alwi Che Ahmad had been reported as saying that Hamzah was part of the pro-Dr Mahathir camp, which had been at loggerheads with an opposing

faction supporting Anwar.

Alwi said Hamzah's camp had no intention of quitting Umno, but that changed when BN secretary-general Datuk Seri Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz met division leaders in the Klang Valley last month, an act which "infuriated" Hamzah.

This led to a quick succession of events that saw Hamzah and the other 35 Umno MPs deciding to quit the party.

Hamzah was among six Umno lawmakers who left the party on Friday, citing loss of confidence in Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi's leadership.

Anwar tweeted last night that certain quarters were intent on creating suspicion and distrust between him and Dr Mahathir.

He said this was to sever their good relationship.

"I am aware of the assumptions and impressions being made by certain quarters given the recent exodus of Umno MPs.

"I continue to support the efforts and leadership of Dr Mahathir, and will continue to work closely with him to realise the *reformasi* agenda as has been agreed upon."

He said PH had been given a mandate to bring about a government that stood against corruption and narrow racial sentiment, and he would focus on doing that.

"We are focusing on developing the economy and lightening the burden of the people, especially the low-income group."