



Prime Minister and Pakatan Harapan chairman Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad at a press conference in Putrajaya yesterday. With him are (from left) PH president Datuk Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin and DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng. PIC BY MOHD FADLI HAMZAH

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GOVT TO SET UP ECONOMIC DECISION-MAKING BODY

It will look into economic matters, make swift decisions, says PM

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THE government will form a central body to make decisions on economic matters. Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the body would have similar functions to the National Economic Action Council formed in 1998. "But it will have a different name. It will look into economic matters and make decisions on them as fast as possible," he said after chairing the Pakatan Harapan presidential council meeting yesterday. Dr Mahathir, who is also PH chairman, said there were "too many cooks" dealing with economic and investment matters, which could lead to delays and a lack of understanding. On claims that the ringgit had weakened, especially against the Thai baht, under PH government, Dr Mahathir said the local cur-

rency had strengthened against the greenback at RM4.10. "It is not the ringgit that has weakened. It is because the US dollar has strengthened, causing the ringgit to fall. "We need to factor in other aspects as well to make accurate conclusions about the country's economic performance (including about the ringgit)." On the East Coast Rail Link (ECRL), Dr Mahathir said the government was renegotiating the project. This, he said, was the reason he had declined to elaborate on the status of the project. "I cannot say what is happening (relating to the ECRL). (We) have to wait for the results. For how long one has to wait? (If possible) as soon as possible." He declined to comment on whether Malaysia would consider accepting China's offer to halve the cost of ECRL of US\$20 billion (RM81 billion). It was reported that the conflicting statements made over

the past week on the status of ECRL had underscored the political and diplomatic challenges facing the government in renegotiating the contract. ECRL contractor China Communications Construction Company Ltd was reported to have offered to cut construction costs for the 688km project by as much as half. Dr Mahathir expressed confidence that PH would win the Semenyih by-election, despite the coalition losing the Cameron Highlands by-election recently. He said PH could win unless Umno and Pas did something "luar biasa" (extraordinary). "We know the 'kafir' (infidel) Umno and Pas are working together," he said in jest. He said he did not coin the term "infidel" for Umno, but it was coined by Pas and now the two parties were working together. "They are cooperating now, so they can win. Pas and Umno can secure victory on this earth now, but things are still unsure in the hereafter," he quipped. The Semenyih by-election was called following the death of its incumbent, Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia's Bakhtiar Mo-

hd Nor, on Jan 11. The by-election will be held on March 2. Dr Mahathir said the presidential council had agreed to form a body in charge of informing people on what the PH government had done. "The body will address all allegations levelled against us and list out what we have done." He said Bersatu president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin had been appointed as PH Election Committee chairman. He rubbished the findings of a survey by pollster Ilham Centre and think tank Penang Institute, which stated that nearly 60 per cent of Malays were unhappy with the PH government. The Ilham survey had interviewed 2,614 Malay respondents between Oct 24 and Dec 24. On former prime minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak's increase in popularity, Dr Mahathir said Najib was popular on social media because he provided a lot of stories. He also rubbished claims that PH was being run by DAP. "They are making news using this fiction saying that PH is run by DAP and I am a puppet. I am not a puppet yet."