

Dr Mahathir says little chance of ousting Najib
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Malaysia's former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad conceded today that the chances of unseating Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak before polls in 2018 are slim, despite his rallying cries for a "people's power" movement to topple the country's leader.

The 90-year-old statesman, who led Malaysia for 22 years, has called on Najib to step down following allegations of corruption and mismanagement at state-owned fund 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB).

But Dr Mahathir says lawmakers within Najib's Umno are protecting their leader, and slammed them for not speaking up.

"All of them are scared and they look after their own safety. They're not looking after the party, the nation. It's about themselves," he told Reuters, speaking from his office at the Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur.

"The way he's going he might go full term. The way Umno has accepted him because they find he's comfortable to be with, I think he can go full term."

Dr Mahathir was once Najib's patron but turned against him in 2013 by criticising the government's economic policies and friendliness with the West.

The former leader demanded Najib step down after it was reported in July that investigators looking into alleged wrongdoing at 1MDB had traced a payment of nearly US\$700 million (RM2.6 billion) going into the prime minister's personal bank accounts.

Najib denies taking any money for personal gain.

The fallout from the allegations has scared away foreign investors though, adding to pressure on Malaysia's economy that was already suffering from falling commodity prices.

Opposition leaders have called on all lawmakers to reject the annual budget that Najib will present to Parliament tomorrow as a show of no confidence against him.

They have also tried to bring a formal no-confidence vote against him.

But Dr Mahathir said such measures would fail as the opposition does not have the numbers to challenge the ruling coalition.

"The fact is that, the opposition is not able to gather enough people to support that. So the government with more support in parliament will push it (the budget) through."

He said Umno lawmakers were scared of Najib taking action against them, while some others were just "comfortable".

Najib has previously cracked down on dissenters in his government, ousting his deputy Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin and other ministers critical of his governance in a Cabinet reshuffle earlier this year.

He also replaced the attorney-general who was leading an investigation into 1MDB.

Muhyiddin, who is the current Umno deputy president, made a rare public appearance with Dr Mahathir earlier this month to condemn the arrest of two men who approached foreign investigators with documents about 1MDB.

Dr Mahathir said he believes Muhyiddin could lead the country, if Najib were to go.

"The former deputy PM would still be able to lead the country, provided that he listens to good advice... people with experience."

Mahathir said he was concerned following reports that police were investigating him for allegedly making defamatory comments during a rally to protest against Najib.

"I fear, not because of anything, but because of manipulation of justice, manipulation of the law. Otherwise according to the law I have done nothing wrong." – Reuters, October 22, 2015.

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