

## **Quoting Shakespeare, Mahathir rules out a 'PM comeback'**

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**The former prime minister brushes off suggestions that he returns to the post, saying he is old and that his involvement in politics does not go beyond campaigning against Najib Razak.**

PUTRAJAYA: Dr Mahathir Mohamad today quoted a line from Shakespeare in ruling out suggestions that he makes a prime ministerial comeback, saying there was no point discussing the prime minister-designate if the coalition still fails to win at the next national polls.

“There is a saying, ‘Much virtue in if’. There can be so many ‘ifs’, like what if there is no one, and so on.

“Well, if there is absolutely nobody, if everyone else is dead and gone, then there’s no choice.

“But it’s an ‘if’. And that ‘if’ won’t happen,” he said in an exclusive interview with FMT, a day after he attended the PKR congress which saw hundreds of PKR members urging for his former protege Anwar Ibrahim to be made the opposition’s prime ministerial candidate.

Mahathir said a Pakatan Harapan government would still have to adhere to the rule of law if there was a plan to appoint Anwar to lead the new government.

“If we have legal hurdles, we must abide by the law. We fight to uphold the rule of law. If when in power we do not abide by the rule of law, what right have we to reprove others who do not follow the rule of law?” the former prime minister told FMT in an exclusive interview at his office at the Perdana Leadership Foundation today.

The former prime minister also said that he had no intention to become a candidate at the next general election.

“I don’t want to contest. I’m now 91, old,” said Mahathir, who last contested in 1999 in Kubang Pasu, the seat he held for 30 years.

When told that he was still active in attending opposition programmes nationwide, Mahathir replied: “Yes, I’m still active. I want this country to be administered by an efficient person, not someone who is a liar and a thief.

“That’s why even at my age, I work hard to improve the situation in this country,” he added.

Former minister in the Prime Minister’s Department Zaid Ibrahim had previously named Mahathir as the person most suitable to become the PM to ensure political stability should there be a change of government.

“A lot of people in the past viewed the opposition as having a fractious leadership. But with Mahathir’s presence, we now have a serious prime minister material, if he wants it,” Zaid wrote early this month.

Mahathir said the question of who would lead a Pakatan government was not relevant until they actually win the polls.

“Firstly, if we lose, we cannot become the prime minister, nobody can. The most important thing is to win the elections. Even after winning, we cannot appoint just anybody unless it is agreed by all.”

Yesterday, Mahathir who was attending the PKR congress in his capacity as the PPBM chairman watched as hundreds of PKR members raised placards calling for Anwar to be installed as the seventh prime minister, a clear message that the party has not departed from its choice of the jailed leader as the PM-designate.

Mahathir who was on stage with other top PKR leaders, was seen recording the moment on his mobile phone.

Sharing the clip he recorded on his iPhone today, he said he had to respect his host.

“We (PPBM leaders) went there as guests. We are from a different party. So when it happened, it reflects PKR’s wishes. We cannot be forced to accept PKR’s wishes,” he said.

Mahathir said the use of placards to express support did not mean anything, saying supporters of Prime Minister Najib Razak had also done the same.

“I still remember about Najib. They prepared placards with the words ‘I love PM’. It doesn’t mean that in the hearts of those carrying the placards, they sincerely love the PM. But when others carry, those who don’t would feel awkward,” he added.

At the PKR congress yesterday, Dr Mahathir, whose dramatic sacking of Anwar from his Cabinet in 1998 sparked some of the largest anti-government rallies in Kuala Lumpur, signed a petition calling for his former protege’s release from jail.

The 14th general election must be held by mid next year. Anwar who is currently serving his five-year jail sentence could also be released next year, but the former opposition leader faces a ban from active politics.

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