

Mahathir: I never said I regret not making Anwar my successor

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The former PM says what's in the past is in the past, and removing Najib Razak as prime minister is what parties in Pakatan Harapan are interested in now.

KUALA LUMPUR: Dr Mahathir Mohamad has refuted an international news report which said he had admitted to making a mistake by not allowing PKR de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim to succeed him as prime minister.

“I didn’t say anything about that. A lot of people quoted me or spoke about me (on this), which is not right,” the PPBM chairman, who ruled Malaysia from 1981 to 2003, told reporters here today.

The Guardian yesterday reported Mahathir as saying in an interview that he had accepted that he made a mistake by, among other things, holding on to power for too long.

He was also reported to have regretted opting for “two men who subsequently disappointed him” to assume the prime minister’s seat, in reference to Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who was in office from 2003 to 2009, and his successor Najib Razak who is the current prime minister.

Asked about this, Mahathir, 92, said removing Najib was what the parties in Pakatan Harapan (PH) were interested in now.

“On that, we all agree. (But) if you talk about the past, we’ll be in a lot of trouble,” he said.

He also said there was no way Anwar could be the next prime minister of Malaysia, especially as he would still be behind bars serving his prison sentence during the 14th general election (GE14).

“He will be there (in prison) until the seventh prime minister works to release him. So there has to be an interim prime minister (first).”

When asked if he had discussed a candidate for the post in his recent meeting with Anwar’s daughter and PKR vice-president Nurul Izzah Anwar in London, Mahathir said no.

“We only spoke about the structure of Pakatan Harapan,” he said.

Anwar is currently serving a five-year jail term at Sungai Buloh prison for a sodomy conviction.

The former deputy prime minister, who was Mahathir’s heir apparent throughout most of the 1990s, was removed from the government and as Umno deputy president in September 1998 for alleged abuse of power.

Many of Anwar’s supporters blamed Mahathir for being behind the incarceration of Anwar after their fallout.

However, Mahathir, who had previously said there were no permanent friends and enemies in politics, said he was not the type to hold a grudge against his enemies.

He is now chairman of PPBM, one of four component parties in opposition PH. The other three parties are DAP, PKR and Amanah.

In April, he indicated that he had no qualms about leading the charge to obtain a royal pardon for Anwar if the opposition wins GE14.

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