

Dr M yet to decide on Hamid's request to quit

By S. Jayakrishnan

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he had not made a decision on Perlis Menteri Besar Tan Sri Dr Abdul Hamid Pawan-
teh's request to resign from his post.

He said he was still considering it but added that he admired Dr Hamid's gesture of not wanting to be Menteri Besar for life.

Dr Mahathir was speaking to reporters after launching the Tunku Abdul Rahman Memorial in Jalan Datuk Onn here today.

"I am still considering his request and have not made a final decision on it yet."

Asked whether Dr Hamid had given any reason for wanting to quit his post at the end of the current term, Dr Mahathir said the Menteri Besar believed that he had contributed what he could and that it was better for someone else to take over the job.

"I admire his attitude very much, especially his intention of not wanting to be Menteri Besar for life."

Dr Hamid had asked Dr Mahathir's permission to step down after the coming general election, adding that his decision was final.

Yesterday, Dr Hamid said he would face "a very difficult dilemma" if his request was rejected.

He did not say what his plans were beyond dropping hints that the post of Menteri Besar would restrict his movement should he venture into other fields, particularly the private sector.

Asked whether other political leaders had made similar requests to him, Dr Mahathir said several of them had indicated their willingness to step down if he wished them to do so.

Dr Mahathir said these leaders indicated that they were prepared to do so without causing problems. However, he did not elaborate.

Asked to comment on the move by a British pressure group to get a court to rule as illegal a loan from Britain for the Pergau dam project, Dr Mahathir said the Government would pursue the matter if the court ruled so.

He said that as far as Malaysia was concerned, the

PM: We'll take action if Britain fails to give loan

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project was given to British contractors on the strength of the loan.

If they could not fulfil their side of the deal, he said, then they had committed a breach of trust.

"We will take action through our courts if they do not give us the loan. They entered into an agreement with us and therefore they must pay, whether it's legal or otherwise."

He said the British companies were only awarded the project as they offered a loan with a very low interest rate.

If there had not been such an offer, he said, the Government would have awarded the project to other companies.

The World Development Movement (WDM), a British pressure group for overseas aid, is challenging the legality of the British Govern-

ment on the loan, which forms part of its Overseas Development Administration programme.

The WDM claimed that the "aid" for the dam project breached the 1980 Overseas Development and Co-operation Act which empowers the Foreign Secretary to authorise projects only "for the purpose of promoting the development or maintaining the economy of a country or territory outside the United Kingdom, or the welfare of its people".

Asked whether he would meet US President Bill Clinton when they attend next week's meeting of the Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation (Apec) in Bogor, near Jakarta, Dr Mahathir said he had sought a meeting with him.

He added that since Clinton would be very busy during the summit, it was not yet certain whether their meeting would take place.