

Dr M: I'll go on serving as long as people need me

NEW YORK, Fri. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today he intends to keep his job for as long as he is still needed by the people.

He did not know if he would be Prime Minister for as long as Deng Xiaoping has been the leader of China, but he said: "For as long as I'm still needed by the people, I'll have to do my bit."

Dr Mahathir made the remark in an interview with CNN, the international television news network, at his St Regis Hotel suite here today.

He was responding to a question on if, following the fresh mandate given by Malaysians in the last general election, he would remain Prime Minister for as long as the Chinese leader.

The question was the only one concerning domestic politics put to Dr Mahathir during the interview which

covered economic issues, especially Japanese dominance in Malaysia's economy.

He was asked on the viewpoint of some Asian countries of Americans being seen as economic colonialist while the Japanese, being Asians themselves, were seen as more benign.

To this, Dr Mahathir replied: "We have benefited more from the willingness of the Japanese to invest in Malaysia. The economic development in Malaysia really started when the Japanese began to invest."

On the other hand, the United States had actually told Japan and South Korea not to join the East Asian Economic Caucus mooted by Malaysia as an economic forum to discuss common problems in world trade among Asian countries, he added.

"We are not against the US in any way but we cer-

tainly feel hurt that the US is standing in the way of the EAEC," he said.

Asked why Japanese companies were using Malaysia as a platform to export goods to the US but not to Japan itself, Dr Mahathir said this pattern was changing with the Japanese starting to buy room air-conditioners and electronic products from Malaysia.

He rejected the view held by certain countries in Southeast Asia on the necessity for the US to maintain its military presence in the region.

Malaysia, he said, did not hold to this view because a military presence would only serve to stimulate bigger military capability among potential enemies.

The cost of such military expansion would continue to mount and this was unhealthy, he added.

Asked whether Malaysia was worried about China

flexing its military muscle in the region through the presence of its navy in some disputed islands in the South China Sea, Dr Mahathir said he disagreed with the Western view that China had military ambitions. "The history of China has not shown that it has had military ambitions," he said.

China's military spending was fairly small compared to its Gross Domestic Product and, contrary to fears, until today China had not attempted to conquer its neighbours, he added.

He said as China became richer, it was bound to increase its military spending but this did not necessarily mean it would become aggressive.

Dr Mahathir also said he had yet to decide on attending the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation summit in Osaka in November. — Bernama.