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Mahathir-Decision

I WILL STEP DOWN WHEN THE TIME COMES, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 2 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight he will step down as the Prime Minister when the time comes.

"The time will come. When the time comes, I will make the decision then," he said in a live interview over CNN's Q&A programme.

Dr Mahathir was responding to a question from moderator Riz Khan as to whether he would stay on as the prime minister and "try for one more term".

Earlier, a caller from the United Kingdom had asked: "What would happen to Malaysia after you're gone"?

Dr Mahathir replied: "I don't think very much ... or anything very radical will change just because I'm not around. We have a very cooperative and cohesive leadership. In Malaysia for the past 40 years we have a succession of leaders without any real upheaval and now I have designated my successor ... so there should not be a problem."

"The only problem of course is when should I step down. It's very difficult to determine but I think I will be able to read the signs," he said.

To a question on what kind of a person he sees in a successor, a visionary or a manager, Dr Mahathir said: "I should think managers more than a visionary."

"People who keep on looking at the future but do not do anything are not going to achieve what we targeted for."

Dr Mahathir also said that there was a fair amount of support for him, be it in the region or outside, and that it was expressed in many ways.

"When I'm abroad, many say that they think highly of Malaysia and they think of Malaysia as a kind of model. So the moment I feel that I am not really liked and that I should be out, I'll be out," he said.

On steps to be taken to preserve Asian values since more western values are invading Asia, Dr Mahathir said: "We must first spell out what are Asean values and we must convince ourselves that they are no inferior to these so-called western values. In fact Asean values are actually universal values."

"The Western people used to practise the same values before but now they have discarded that for their rather self-centred and materialistic approach to life...so we cannot copy that," he said.

During the one-hour interview, a caller from Singapore praised the prime minister, saying that among the Asean leaders, she admired Dr Mahathir the most for his confidence and pride and adding: "you have guts".

Dr Mahathir was also asked for his secret in keeping his youthfulness despite his age, his (heart) bypass and hectic schedule.

"I don't really know but I used to tell people that you have to choose your parents wisely," he said.

The questions were posed to Dr Mahathir was through fax, e-mail and direct calls from England, Switzerland, Ireland, Indonesia, Lebanon, Hong Kong, Brazil, Singapore and Malaysia. --BERNAMA

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