

PM wants **honest** successor 43

KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said his successor should be an "honest man who is capable" and one who understands economics.

The Prime Minister said in an interview with the International Herald Tribune on Sept 23 that he was not looking for a genius.

"I am not expecting a fair copy of myself. This is a country that depends so much on trade and any leader of the country must understand economics," he said to a question on qualities he would look for in a successor.

Dr Mahathir said he would remain as Prime Minister for "slightly longer, perhaps until I can find a successor."

Asked if he was putting too many eggs in one basket by also holding the Finance Minister and Home

Minister portfolios, Dr Mahathir said: "I hope it will not be for too long."

"Contrary to the usual belief that I am a dictator, I actually work as a team," he added.

On the sacking of his deputy Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and subsequent events which followed at a time when the country was hosting the Commonwealth Games and during Queen Elizabeth's visit here, Dr Mahathir said he did not think about the timing when he acted.

"I thought he (Anwar) needed to be removed and I removed him," he said.

Asked what effect Suharto's stepping down had on him, Dr Mahathir believed that Anwar was much more influenced by this than he (Dr Mahathir) was.

"He thinks that because Suharto had to step down, it follows that I could be

subjected to the same pressures.

"But my situation is quite different. I'm here actually by popular support — at least I think so.

"From the reception I get everywhere I go, there is no animosity towards me," he added.

On the recent demonstrations in Kuala Lumpur where some protesters called for his resignation, Dr Mahathir said the Government had always maintained that one of the most attractive things about Malaysia was its political stability.

"I'm quite sure that what has happened is going to be interpreted by foreigners as meaning there is no political stability.

"But it is not something that is as violent as seen in other countries and we are quite prepared to handle it," he said.

To a question on whether a "larger crackdown" beyond those already detained could be expected, Dr Mahathir said he did not think so.

"It all depends on how violent they are. If they are violent and they do things like looting or breaking shop windows; the police have to put a stop to that.

"And to put a stop to violence, you cannot use kid-glove methods. The police have been very restrained. In other countries they (demonstrators) would be beaten," he said.

On whether he would call for elections soon, Dr Mahathir said: "I have a lot of time to mull over these things. I'll think about it."

He admitted that there might be an electoral backlash by Anwar's friends and supporters,

adding, however, that the party could handle this.

"Our party has got very popular support. It is a mass-based party. We have got 2.4 million members and by and large, they are loyal to the party."

On economics, Dr Mahathir said he felt vindicated "to a certain extent" now when a lot of other people have also called for some sort of control over international capital flows.

"But that is not important to me. What is more important is whether my views are taken seriously now for people to act. The world should recognise the truth."

Asked if a fixed rate system for currency was viable, he replied that an old idea was not necessarily bad simply because it was old and hence it should be re-examined.

He believed it was possible to change decades of free market ideology provided there was political will.

"We should be open enough to examine everything that we are doing to find out whether they are really good or they have some faults which need to be curbed."

On Singapore being isolated in recent months by both Malaysia and Indonesia, Dr Mahathir dismissed any notion that this posed any danger to regional stability.

He said, however, Singapore "should learn to manage itself not through undermining its neighbours".

"They increased the interest rate on the ringgit, causing the ringgit to flow out of Malaysia and drying up the liquidity in the country. That undermined us."