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Mahathir - Successor

MAHATHIR TO STAY ON AS PM FOR SOMETIME

By: Azman Ujang

TOKYO, Oct 17 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today he would stay on as prime minister for sometime after scrapping original plans to retire at the end of this year.

He said he was unsure how long he would stay on the job but he had to give sometime for his successor to do his work before he could decide to step down.

The 73-year old premier said although he originally planned to retire after the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit here next month and had to postpone it because of the economic crisis, developments following the sacking of his deputy Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim would mean that he would have to stay on for sometime.

Anwar had been Dr Mahathir's hand-picked successor before being fired last month because of morality problems and the prime minister had said he would not appoint a deputy until after the Umno election next year.

Dr Mahathir, who has been prime minister for 17 years, also disclosed that Umno would hold its general assembly and election either in June or July next year during which it will elect a new deputy president to replace Anwar. The party's deputy president normally becomes deputy prime minister.

"I have to give sometime for my successor to do his work before I can step down. I don't know how long," he said.

He said if the Malaysian economy recovered and there was stability in the country, he had no problems about retiring.

"I'm already 73 and next year I'll be 74, so it's time to retire but how long it will be before I retire I can't really say.

"I have to observe my would-be successor, you know my successors sometimes changed their mind or they misbehaved themselves. Of course I cannot because of my own wish to retire make a decision that is not good for the country but I really wish that I can retire," said Dr Mahathir.

When one of the editors who interviewed Dr Mahathir commented that he looked like a 63-year old man, the prime minister said: "Looks like 63 but the fact is that I'm 73."

-- BERNAMA

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