

No reason for me to step down now, says Mahathir

Sun 18 JUN 1999

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today put to rest rumours that he would be announcing his retirement at the Umno general assembly tomorrow.

"I don't see why I should resign at this moment as I have always said that I need to have more time to hand over the reins of government to somebody who is capable of taking over from me," he said in an interview with CNN aired tonight.

Speculation was rife that he would be announcing his retirement since he gave notice that he would be making a surprise announcement at the assembly.

Asked by CNN journalist Lorraine Hahn whether Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who was appointed Deputy Prime Minister early this year, was ready to take over, Mahathir said: "He has done very well but there is no harm in waiting a little longer to see he settles down properly."

"At the moment, the situation in Malaysia is not normal because we are preparing for the elections and he is focusing on the elections and not on-really running the country"

On how secure Abdullah's

position was given the suggestions that his appointment was a stop-gap measurer, he said: "He is as secure as can be unless something unusual happens."

Hahn also asked Mahathir whether the prerequisites for calling for an election had been met, including the recovering economy and finding a capable successor.

The PM's replied: "As far as the economy is concerned, yes." However, he said there was much confusion due to jailed former deputy prime minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim making accusations of a conspiracy against him.

"In Malaysia, nothing is secret, everybody knows what politicians are thinking, even before they start thinking sometimes."

"But here is a case where there was no idea at all there was anybody conspiring against him until the moment he was dismissed."

Mahathir also dismissed rumours on his health saying he had fully recovered from his bout of pneumonia.

He also said that justice was served in Anwar's first trial. "I am satisfied that justice was done but of course there is no convincing people who already made up their minds."