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Mahathir-Successor

DR MAHATHIR TO STAY ON UNTIL THE RIGHT SUCCESSOR IS FOUND

LONDON, Feb 7 (Bernama) -- Although he had thought about stepping down sometime last year, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said no matter what people are saying, he would stay on until the right successor is found.

"I have a responsibility now to ensure that Malaysia gets the right kind of leadership. I will not allow any snide remarks to deflect me from my duty," the prime minister said at a meeting with students at Malaysia Hall, here, yesterday.

Thousands of students showed up to hear him explain the political and economic situation in the country.

Closed circuit television monitors had to be installed in other rooms because the main hall was jampacked with students. Some could not even get in.

The prime minister is on his way to a meeting of the G15 grouping of developing countries in Jamaica.

Dr Mahathir said: "I have been the prime minister far longer than many people. I was looking forward to resigning last year. I am tired of this thing.

"But I have a responsibility to ensure that the country is not led by someone who tells lies and who pretends to be pious while he is not," he said.

The prime minister said he brought Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim into Umno based on his religious credentials but he soon turned out to be a man in a hurry and populist who wanted to be popular even at the expense of the country.

"When I first appointed him a deputy minister, he had already demanded why he should not be a full minister. I told him he had just joined Umno and he should work his way up.

"I again supported him when he wanted to become Umno Youth chief and later a vice president of the party. I also supported him when he decided to challenge Tun Ghafar Baba for the deputy president's post.

"In terms of economic management, he was willing to do whatever the IMF wanted. Had we followed IMF's wishes, it would have been a disaster like Thailand and Korea.

"So even if I am cursed or even if I am told I should go away, I will still stay because I have a duty to the country.

"What people call me is irrelevant. I have got everything that I want. If I am given the choice, I would rather resign and spend my time "buat ibadat" (fulfilling religious obligations) and write.

"But now, I will not resign. I will stay here unless somebody shoots me or tries to assassinate me like some people are thinking. It doesn't matter.

"My responsibility is to ensure that Malaysia gets the right kind of leadership," he said.

Later at a news conference for the Malaysian and British media, Dr Mahathir said: "As of now, Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi is apparently the heir apparent. I don't know. Anything can happen from now until the party election.

"For the time being, and until the party decides...because I have to have a party deputy president to deal with certain matters while I am away and even while I am in the country," he said.

When asked why it took so long for him to appoint a deputy prime

minister, Dr Mahathir said: "Actually, I wanted to make the party make the choice, but the party election is a long time in coming and the party felt that the party election should be held after the general election and therefore we need to fill the vacuum. Otherwise we would have the vacuum for far too long."

-- BERNAMA

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