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Dr Mahathir: I will not become senior minister when I retire

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PUTRAJAYA, Mon. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said he will not become a senior minister after he retires from his post but gracefully go "like a good old man".

The Prime Minister, who had initially thought of retiring last year, said he would spend his retirement praying "because my days are over".

"I (will) have to prepare for the next world," he said in reply to questions at a Press conference after touring the new Prime Minister's Department building at the Federal Administrative Centre here.

He had been asked if he would contemplate assuming such a post upon retirement.

Also present were his wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Abdul Halim Ali, Putrajaya Holdings Sdn Bhd chief executive officer Datuk Mohd Hashim Hassan and Putrajaya Corporation president Tan Sri Azizan Zainul Abidin.

Dr Mahathir said he would have even retired last year if his plans to hand over the premiership to his successor had not gone awry.

Elaborating, Dr Mahathir said he never even imagined that he would one day occupy the new Prime Minister's office when he laid the foundation stone for the administrative centre in 1996. (The project was scheduled for completion this year).

"When it (Putrajaya) was planned, I believed I will never be able to occupy the Prime Minister's office or the house here. I was already planning then to retire by 1998 in order to give my successor (then) sufficient time to take over and prepare for the elections.

"And 1998 was a very important year as we had some very important events such as the Commonwealth Games," he said.

Dr Mahathir said to him, it was irrelevant whether he occupied the new office or not.

"It is for the present and future Governments of Malaysia....it is not meant for me," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the idea of building the new administrative capital had been mooted a long time ago.

(The Putrajaya Administrative Centre sits on a 4,581ha area. Most ministries and Government departments would move to the new centre by 2005).

"But as usual, people talked and did not do anything. By the time I became Prime Minister, things got bad in terms of traffic jam. So, we decided to build a new administrative capital and the condition was that it should not be too far from Kuala Lumpur."

Dr Mahathir said funds to construct the project were raised by Putrajaya Development Corporation, the developer of the project.

"We had the money to finance this (project) even though people tried to rob us by devaluing our money. We managed our economy and finances well enough to be able to finance this project," he said.

He said no foreign consultants were engaged in the construction of the centre.

The planning was carried out by the Public Works Department.

"The whole project was designed, built and managed by Malaysian companies using 90 per cent local material.

"Although the designs in the case of the furniture and chandelier are

French, it was manufactured by Malaysians," he said, adding that this was testimony of the tremendous improvement in the country's construction industry.

"I think we have reached a certain level of development where we can actually afford the building."

He said in Malaysia, it was not uncommon for the Government to build towns and cities.

"We don't build a single house or one row of shophouses. We build whole towns complete with offices, town centres, hospitals, and schools with all other amenities and this is not done just by the Government but also by the private sector."

Dr Mahathir said good examples were Petaling Jaya, Shah Alam or Petrajaya in Sarawak.

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