

09 SEP 1999

Mahathir-Students

DR MAHATHIR EXPLAINS WHY HE STAYED AWAY FROM UNIVERSITIES

BANGI, Sept 9 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he kept himself away from universities the past years to give his potential successor then (Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim) a chance to meet and get close to all the parties, including students.

"I did that (stayed away from universities) because I had planned to withdraw from politics and the government. With that, I gave a chance to my potential successor to meet and be close to all parties to build up rapport because he would be the one taking over from me," the Prime Minister said today.

Dr Mahathir said he also did not visit the states and meet state and Umno leaders as often then because that task was given to his potential successor.

"I need not be too popular and I wanted to withdraw, and because of that I felt there should not be a comparison with my successor," he said in his speech before a dialogue session with students of public and private institutions of higher learning at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia here.

Dr Mahathir said he would have retired at the end of last year if not for the economic downturn in 1997 which was caused by international currency speculators.

"I am already old, approaching 73 then, and that was a good time to withdraw and not be involved anymore with the country's administration," he said.

He also touched on political problems (Anwar's removal) and the strategies taken by the government to tackle the economic downturn.

Dr Mahathir said as the leader he was prepared to listen to comments and criticisms made by all parties, and not only praises.

"We must listen to comments, criticisms and harsh words directed at us, otherwise we may feel our feet are not planted firmly on the ground and we are so good that we cannot make any mistakes.

"Maybe in such a situation we may do things that are not good for us, the country and the people," he said.

However, criticisms alone without support would weaken one's spirit and therefore there should be a balance between supporting and opposing views, he said.

In this context, he said one should not listen only to people making adverse comments and criticisms because it was possible that not all that was said was true.

In fact, the parties being criticised should be given a chance to explain themselves because the comments directed at them by certain people might have been due to a lack of understanding, he said.

"I believe it is not possible for a person to get 100 percent support from the community. There is bound to be some who will disagree...and because of that we need to make explanations," he said.

-- BERNAMA

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