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Mahathir-Retire

MAHATHIR YET TO FIND "SUITABLE" TIME TO RETIRE

PUTRAJAYA, June 29 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today he will have to find a "suitable time" to retire after the general election.

He said it was not that easy to retire because his supporters and voters largely kept telling him not to.

"As such I can't really say when I want to retire," he told a group of African journalists who met the prime minister at his office here.

Dr Mahathir said a lot of people felt insecure when a leader went away and when they have to accept a new one.

"I cannot announce when I will retire because it will have an effect on the sentiment for the government," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the question of him retiring did not arise.

"But I can't leave it to an inexperienced deputy to manage not just the party and government but also the election.

"So I have to stay back and after the election I will have to find a suitable time to retire," Dr Mahathir said.

The prime minister was replying to one of the journalists who noted that Dr Mahathir had "lost" three deputy prime ministers under his leadership.

The journalist suggested that many people interpreted this as Dr Mahathir's wish to cling on to power for a long time.

Dr Mahathir said the country has had four prime ministers, including himself, and history has shown that when a change in Malaysia's leadership took place, it has never been accompanied by violence.

"We have always accepted that one day we have to go. I accept that one day I have to go. Maybe I have stayed longer than the other (prime ministers)," he said.

Dr Mahathir has been prime minister since 1981.

Dr Mahathir said the people wanted him to continue leading the country.

"I think it is a responsibility. One cannot think about one's own wish to relax and enjoy life," he said.

He said the democratic process in Malaysia allows a person to be elected and re-elected unlike in some countries where a leader is given only one term to serve and ends up not being able to do much for his country.

Dr Mahathir also denied accusations that he was a dictator.

"I am not a dictator here. I can move around freely in this country. I can go to the supermarket and I can mix with the people," he said.

The prime minister said although some people disliked him, they have never resorted to violence.

The prime minister also said he saw no reason for anyone to fear him or the government.

He said it was true that the prime minister has a strong say in decision-making, giving some people the impression that the post was a powerful one.

Asked what would he like to see after his retirement, Dr Mahathir expressed hope that his policies would be continued although he did not expect his successor would want to follow everything.

On the next general election which has to be held by June next year, Dr Mahathir said he was unable to give a time frame.

"That is a secret I keep close to my chest," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the important thing was to surprise the Opposition.  
The prime minister also briefed the 18 African journalists on  
Malaysia's latest economic and political situation.

-- BERNAMA

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