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PM: Duty to give nation right leader

P. Selvarani in London

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will not step down until he is able to hand over the leadership of the country to an able and qualified person.

He said that although he would be happy to step down, he could not do so until he was assured that Malaysia was in the hands of the right kind of leader.

"My responsibility is to ensure that Malaysia gets the right kind of leadership. For as long as I have that influence on the choice of the next leader of the country, I will stay," he said at a dialogue with nearly 500 Malaysian students at Malaysia Hall on Saturday evening.

The Prime Minister said he was not important but what he did was important and that it would affect the future of the country.

"If I am thrown out of office, it does not make a difference to me. I have been in office for 17 years.

"There is nowhere higher I can go. I cannot become the king of this country.

"I have been the Prime Minister far longer than any other Prime Minister. I don't want anything else," he added.

"Even if I am cursed, even if I am told that I should resign and go away, I will still stay because I have a duty to perform.

"What people call me is irrelevant. I have got everything that I have wanted. What else can I want? I have reached the highest office in my country. So, what else do I want?.

"If I am given a choice, I would rather resign and spend my time doing good deeds (ibadat) and also write a few things," he added.

Dr Mahathir said he would not allow snide remarks by certain quarters prevent him from performing his duty.

"I have a duty to perform and I will perform (it)," he said.

He said he was also facing the dilemma of making decisions which would benefit the country but not go down well with the rakyat.

"It is not the Malay Dilemma but the Mahathir Dilemma where I make a decision for the good of the country and not for my own popularity.

"Others may dispute it. They can curse me and say I am vengeful and not considerate.

"But to me, it's not whether I am popular but what I do is right or wrong. What I do is for my country," he said.

He said the Government's recent decision to increase toll rates was a move which did not win favour with the rakyat.

He said nobody would want to pay toll and the Government would have to make everything free if the Government wanted to be popular.

However, he said, this would create further problems as the Government would then need to source the funds for the construction and maintenance of highways from revenue earned.

This would, in turn, reduce the allocation of funds for other deserving projects such as educational institutions.

"So, what is our choice? If I build a toll-free road, I cannot have a university. You can have one but not the other. The Government has to, therefore, make a choice."

Speaking at a Press conference later, the Prime Minister said Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi been asked for the time being to assume the responsibilities of the Umno deputy president until the party elections

were held.

He said this was because he needed to have a deputy party president to deal with certain party matters.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president, said although he had wanted to let the party chose the deputy president, he needed to fill the vacuum pending party elections to be held after the general election.

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