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Mahathir-Succession

DR MAHATHIR TO CONTRIBUTE TO UMNO EVEN AFTER RETIREMENT

By: E.Sivabalan

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 28 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has pledged to continue serving Umno even after he retires as Prime Minister through his ideas and knowledge gained during his years in service to the country and the party.

"Even if I am not the Prime Minister, whatever knowledge that I have and that I can contribute to the party, I will do so," the Umno president said.

Dr Mahathir said this when asked if he was committed to handing over the Prime Minister's post to his successor just before the next general election.

"Whether just before or long before, it will depend on our assessment," said.

Dr Mahathir was reported as saying just after the 1999 general election that this would be his last term in office. Dr Mahathir became Prime Minister in 1981, succeeding Tun Hussein Onn.

Speaking in an exclusive year-end interview with Bernama at the Prime Minister's Department in Putrajaya last Tuesday, Dr Mahathir however said he "cannot just desert the party and leave just like that."

Dr Mahathir said he was made the Prime Minister and Umno president with the support of the party and when the time came for him to leave office, he would still have to continue supporting the party.

Asked in what capacity he would like to serve the party, he said it could be in whatever form.

"May be if they need to ask me any question about anything, I will be prepared to answer. If they want me to do some work.... perhaps I will do it if I can," he said.

However, Dr Mahathir did not say when he would hand over the premiership to his successor and he gave his reasons.

"The reason why I keep people guessing is that any hint I make about my stepping down or whatever, it will have an effect on the economy and the market. And I don't want my personal choice to have an effect on the market," he said.

On suggestions that his departure would leave the country without someone with his kind of capabilities and calibre, Dr Mahathir said: "No, I don't think so (because) each Prime Minister is different from the other, his way of working, his style and his delivery."

Dr Mahathir said it did not mean that if he was no longer the Prime Minister, everything would grind to a halt.

"Things will be done but they will be done differently," he said.

He said the only thing that would be a common feature was that the Barisan Nasional and Umno would continue with the same kind of policies, "perhaps with some slight improvements here and there but basically they will be the same policies."

Dr Mahathir said he found it quite strange that on the one hand certain groups seemed to condemn him as a dictator and on the other hand, these groups claimed that when he retired there would be no one else to replace him.

"So there is a contradictory view on this," he said.

He said whether one liked it or not, one day he had to go. "If I drop dead I won't be around, somebody has to take over," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the present leadership had prepared Umno for that

eventuality.

"If I go, then there are people who will take over from me. The succession is determined," he said.

On Opposition claims that he was making decisions for the country without consulting his Cabinet Ministers, Dr Mahathir said it was not true.

"It is a comment arising from wrong perception. The Opposition has always tried to label me as a dictator, as someone who decides and does not care about the views of others."

Dr Mahathir said as Prime Minister, he put forward ideas but it was up to the Cabinet to decide whether to accept them or not.

"If the Cabinet does not accept, then of course the idea will not see the light of day and these things people never know. They only see decisions that are agreed to by the Cabinet.

He said that at all Cabinet meetings, the ministers would give their views and make suggestions and they would then be debated to see if the suggestions were workable.

"There are processes within the Cabinet room and as you know Cabinet meetings are secret. We don't go and film Cabinet sessions. But I can assure you that everybody does speak and sometimes I tell them we don't have enough time."

"So, to assume that I am the only one laying down the law is wrong and the (opposition) comment is based on wrong assumption," Dr Mahathir added.

--BERNAMA

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