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`Nation will remain stable without me'

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he is confident Malaysia will remain stable and continue to develop without him at the helm because the Government is putting in place the necessary leadership.

"I think, we have put in place the necessary leadership at the various branches to ensure that the development of the country is stable," he said, reacting to a report suggesting instability in Malaysia in the post-Mahathir era.

He was asked about a Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER) report quoting the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) as forecasting instability in Malaysia after Mahathir's departure.

"I think that is what they are expecting, what they would like. Any country that is stable, they will try to destabilise," Dr Mahathir told newsmen after launching the two-day Malaysian Structural Steel Convention and Exhibition in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Dr Mahathir said when people start to fight and kill each other, these foreign forecasters will say "the leadership of the country does not know how to run the country".

According to the FEER, the US Government wants to make sure it is not hit with any big surprises in Malaysia when the 74-year old Dr Mahathir eventually leaves office.

On June 22, the American intelligence community organised a conference in Washington entitled, "Prospect for a Post-Mahathir Malaysia", attended by officials from the CIA and the departments of State and Defence.

The speakers included academicians, economists and former American diplomats and journalists in Malaysia.

They concluded that Malaysia could face facing political uncertainty and infighting in Umno, the ruling political party.

The panelists also predicted new economic turmoil in three to five years because of growing fiscal debt, brought on by the country's rescue of troubled companies and the minimal restructuring of the economy in the wake of the 1997 financial crisis.

The group also concluded that the political career of imprisoned former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim was not necessarily finished as he will be pardoned by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong and reinstated as an Umno member.

To this, Dr Mahathir chided that the "panelists may know something that he (Dr Mahathir) does not".

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