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I want a few years for myself, says PM

PUTRAJAYA, Sat. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad reiterated that he wants to retire as the Prime Minister because "I too want a few years for myself".

Without dropping a hint on when he wants to call it quits, the Prime Minister, responding to a question whether he had again thought of stepping down after indicating about it in 1997, said: "Yes, I want to retire. I am 76, but I don't belong to myself, I belong to the public.

"Whatever I do, I must think of its consequences. There are people who say that if I say things like this (quitting) there would be a scramble for power in the party, they don't want that.

"So what can I say? Say that I have plans that by next year I would retire? You know what will happen, there would be a tussle."

Dr Mahathir said he had been advised by his Cabinet colleagues not to talk about stepping down because "if I talk about it, problem will arise".

"I too want a few years for myself before I die, I want to write, I want to write a little bit, travel a bit.

"On the contrary, the older I become, the more work I have. I don't get to go on holidays like I used to," he said in an exclusive interview with the New Sunday Times.

The interview was in conjunction with his 20th year in office as the Prime Minister. It was held at his office here.

Asked about a view that there would not be "an immediate transfer of the baton" as he would stay beyond 2004, provided his health holds, Dr Mahathir said he had to be responsible.

"It's quite possible I drop dead tomorrow and I leave the party without leadership.

"That would be very, very irresponsible of me so I'm grooming the leadership."

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