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No regrets, says Dr M (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said whatever decisions he has made during the past 20 years as Prime Minister have been for the good of the country.

He said he might have made some mistakes as well as decisions that were unpopular along the way.

"I may have made some mistakes but I can't regret those decisions that I have made although they may be very unpopular and cause me to lose support.

"I believe I did this for the good of the country, not for my own good because I am going away. I can't stay forever," said Dr Mahathir who had been in power for exactly two decades today.

Dr Mahathir, one of the longest-serving leaders in the world today, was asked during a Press conference if he had any regrets during his tenure so far.

Earlier, the Prime Minister opened the Malaysian Electrical Power Forum 2001 at a hotel here.

Asked how long more he planned to stay in office, Dr Mahathir said: "I hope I am allowed to retire as soon as I am allowed to retire.

"I am not supposed to mention this because it would have a bad effect on the market. Maybe the share prices might go up if I retire. They say it may go down," he said to the laughter of journalists.

Asked about his greatest achievement as the Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir said the country's greatest success was the stability and relative racial harmony it had experienced.

Many multi-racial countries, he added, were not able to achieve stability due to differences among the races there.

"In Malaysia, we have our differences but we settle them around the table. That is something started by the Alliance party at the beginning but accepted even by the Opposition," Dr Mahathir added.

Asked if there was anything else he hoped to achieve, the Prime Minister said: "Not much more. Enough-lah."

He hoped Malaysia would continue to remain stable and grow rapidly.

The Prime Minister had a typically busy day, starting the morning by chairing a pre-council meeting for Barisan Nasional MPs and Senators at Parliament House.

After the briefing, the Backbenchers' Club presented him a pulut kuning to mark his 20th year in office. A doa selamat was recited by religious adviser to the Prime Minister, Tan Sri Dr Abdul Hamid Othman.

The Prime Minister sportingly cut the pulut kuning while those who had gathered around him, including Cabinet Ministers, applauded. Dr Mahathir was appointed the country's fourth Prime Minister on July 16, 1981, succeeding Tun Hussein Onn.

On the briefing, several MPs said Dr Mahathir explained the effect to the country's economy due to the slowdown in the United States.

Malaysia, he said, was not badly affected as its economy was strong and able to withstand the setbacks.

Dr Mahathir expressed hope that the three-week Dewan Rakyat session would proceed smoothly.

After lunch, another reception was held for Dr Mahathir in his office in Putrajaya.

The function, organised by the Welfare and Sports Body of the Prime

Minister's office, was attended by about 80 people including his principal officers.

In the programme was a doa selamat and a poem read by the Prime Minister's press secretary Datuk Zakaria Wahab on Dr Mahathir's sacrifices and service.

Tonight, the Malacca BN honoured the Prime Minister to a dinner with the rakyat where more than 25,000 people gathered at Dataran Sejarah in Ayer Keroh.

Besides sajak (poetry) recital, Dr Mahathir and others present were also treated to a fireworks display.