

# 'Islamic nations still want Dr M'

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KHARTOUM: Will Malaysia be able to continue playing its role on the international front after Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's resignation next year? This is the worry of the leaders of many Islamic nations.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said over the last several days, he met Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hariri in Beirut, Sudanese President Omar Hassan Al Bashir and a number of foreign ministers and all said that Mahathir's resignation was not welcomed in Islamic countries.

"In fact, they are upset over it, as Mahathir is an Islamic leader who's firm and bold in expressing his views," he told a group of Malaysian students and Petronas employees at a gathering at the Grand Holiday

Villa Hotel yesterday.

Syed Hamid, who is here to attend the annual meeting of Foreign Ministers of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), told Bernama that there were many questions raised and worries expressed by the leaders as to whether Malaysia would be able to continue with its role on the international front.

They said Mahathir has established a reputation as an Islamic leader with integrity and tremendous credibility and has gained the support of Islamic countries.

They also wanted to know how the change of leadership would affect Malaysia politically and economically.

"I had to explain to them the process of succession, the leadership hierarchy structure to reassure

them that although Mahathir has been pivotal to Malaysia's development, he is going to leave a sure-footed country politically and economically and that Malaysia would not abandon its role.

"A lot of them feel a sense of loss and worry. I spent a lot of time reassuring them and I think I could allay some of their fears and this is good for the country," Syed Hamid said.

He said by naming Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi as his successor, Mahathir has showed that the country's interest is paramount to him so as to bring Malaysia forward into the globalised 21st century.

"That I think is reassuring . . . they feel comfortable and we need to continue to build up the same type of confidence and continue with what we have been doing all this while."

The foreign minister said the "burden" on Malaysia on the international front is getting heavier as more countries are looking to it to play the lead role, crediting the country as a model Islamic state.

"We have been a successful nation without compromising our Islamic values and the question that is often asked is how did we go about it."

Syed Hamid said Malaysia's experience shows that respect is something that has to be earned and it is able to have its own seal in world affairs and international relations through strategic thinking.

If this is not done, all efforts would not be focused and Malaysia would not be respected as a country which projects the positive image of Islam.

"We have shown that Islam is a

religion not inconsistent with modernisation and that it is relevant and flexible and I think this we have reflected very well.

"People respect us when we give our views as we match our words with action. Sometimes we can come out with beautiful rhetorics but if it is not accompanied by action, then it goes to nought, and we do not move from one position to another"

Syed Hamid also disclosed that at the Kuala Lumpur OIC summit next year, the OIC secretariat, which has for a long time been headed by a secretary-general from the Arab-speaking countries, will be replaced by a candidate from Asia.

Asked if a Malaysian was in line for the job, he said: "Malaysia is one of those countries that people have talked about."