

Mahathir: I don't aspire to be a great world leader

By TAN KAH PENG

LONDON: Saying he has no ambitions to be a great world leader, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad told *Financial Times* in an interview that "it will be a clean retirement" when he steps down next October.

"After I retire, I won't be a voice for anybody. I'll just be my own voice. I'm not ambitious to be a preacher (of Islam) or wielding any influence. I've had my day," he told the newspaper in its supplement

on Malaysia

Asked whether he expected his successor, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, to make any changes, the Prime Minister said he did not set policies alone and Cabinet ministers and Barisan Nasional coalition parties made decisions after agreement.

"You'll be surprised by the amount of consultation we have on making a decision on any issue. So long as this government continues in power, the policy will be same," he said.

On whether the arrest and prosecution of Anwar had damaged Malaysia's reputation abroad, Dr Mahathir said he had nothing against his former deputy whom he had helped to groom as an Umno leader.

"I discovered his inclination towards womanising of which you can accuse lots of people. But when I found that he indulges in what to me is a very dirty habit, I just could not accept that this man would be the next prime minister," said Dr Mahathir.

Asked whether Malaysia could do without the ISA, Dr Mahathir said even liberal democracies felt that there was now a need for preventive measures to stop those who posed a security threat.

For Malaysia, the country could not afford to allow people to play the race card, otherwise "there will be clashes between races and that will destabilise the country and make us poor."

Asked if he would consider banning PAS, Dr Mahathir

said: "If the party stepped beyond the line and tries to resort to force of arms then action will be taken as Western countries had done so by banning fascist and communist parties that pose a threat to democracy."

In a commentary about Malaysia's foreign policy, the *FT* writer described Dr Mahathir as an outspoken champion of the developing world, widely portrayed as "the combative maverick of East Asia".

"But the terrorist attacks of

Sept 11 had caused a significant reappraisal of the outside world's view of Dr Mahathir, who is seen by the Bush Administration as a progressive leader of a modern, largely Muslim, state and a staunch ally in the war on terror."

"But Dr Mahathir has indicated that this new-found warmth in relations with the US might not last long if Washington goes ahead with unilateral military action against Iraq," wrote John Thornhill, the writer of the article.

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