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PM: Willingness to wait for posts a good sign

PUTRAJAYA, Wed. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the willingness by his successors to wait for 16 months before taking over Malaysia's leadership is a good sign for the country's political stability.

He said he had to give in to calls from those who would succeed him to continue serving for that period although he wanted to retire earlier.

"Actually if I'm no longer prime minister, Pak Lah (Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi) will be the Prime Minister today and perhaps Najib (Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak) will be Deputy Prime Minister, but they are willing to wait 16 months to get the posts." Dr Mahathir, who is Umno president, said this at a meeting with the Kubang Pasu Umno division committee members at his office here.

The Prime Minister, who is also the Kubang Pasu division chief, said the situation was different some time back when there was a leader who wanted to seize power from him by toppling him from the Prime Minister's post.

Faced with such a situation, he said he did not want to give up his post and had fought back to retain it.

He said he had now made the decision to retire for the sole reason that he had been the Prime Minister for 21 years and he felt that was too long.

"Nobody pressured me, there're no feelings of disappointment," he said.

The Prime Minister said he did not wish to retire in 1999 because then there were people who hated him.

"I tried to restore, not my image but the party's image, so that Umno is back as the leading party supported by the people."

Dr Mahathir said that although he would be giving up all posts in the party and Government, he would continue to lead the Kubang Pasu Umno division, as wished by the division's leaders.

He said he would carry on serving the party after his retirement by going around the country to keep the Umno spirit alive among the Malays.

The Prime Minister said he wished to see the Malays being independent and no longer having to depend on "crutches".

He also hoped that his successors would continue to safeguard Malaysia's integrity.

"In this struggle, nothing is better than people respecting us," he said.

Dr Mahathir, however, declined to comment when asked if he would defend his Kubang Pasu parliamentary seat in the coming election as asked for by Kubang Pasu Umno deputy chief Tan Sri Osman Aroff in his speech earlier.

About 100 leaders from the Kubang Pasu division, including from the Youth, Wanita and Puteri wings, attended the meeting. - Bernama

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