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Malaysia can continue to grow, says Dr Mahathir

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad reiterated today that Malaysia has what it takes to continue growing when he leaves in October next year.

The Prime Minister said the country had the policies and mechanisms needed to develop.

"The policies are there, the mechanisms are there. So, I think even when I am not around, Malaysia can do with other people who are conversant with our policies," he told CNN host Lorraine Hahn in an interview over CNN's Talk Asia programme aired tonight.

Hahn conducted the taped interview at Dr Mahathir's official residence in Putrajaya. The interview had a personal flavour as Dr Mahathir answered questions on his childhood and his feelings about resigning.

Asked if he would be missed as a leader, he said some people undoubtedly would but that they could do without him.

He reiterated that he was "absolutely positive" about leaving and would not take on a job like what Singapore Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew did after retirement.

"I just don't think I should be around interfering with things," he said.

Dr Mahathir added, however, that he would remain involved in politics in order to explain Malaysia's policies to people.

"I will certainly be involved in politics because I am going to go around and explain the whole idea of Malaysia and its politics and why it should be a democracy, and how you should go about developing the country.

"I think I will stay with the party (Umno). I want to ensure that the party continues to win. So, I will have more time to go down and meet people."

Asked about his successor Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Dr Mahathir said both of them shared the same beliefs, despite the different leadership styles.

"We believe in the same thing... in the same methods. Of course, the styles will be different, but that is all right.

"I think it will be good for people to have a change," he added.

On his emotions when he announced his resignation at the Umno general assembly in June, Dr Mahathir said he probably lost control of himself.

"I thought I could have avoided being emotional, but under the circumstances, I suppose I lost control of myself."

He added, however, that he had looked forward to making the announcement and then stepping down immediately.

Asked about the "shock" it caused his family and party members, Dr Mahathir said he did not tell anyone - not even his wife - about his announcement because he knew they would try to dissuade him from doing so.

He said the time was right for him to step down after having revived Umno and the country following the economic crisis and the problems with his former deputy, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

On how the Japanese occupation of Malaya shaped his life, Dr Mahathir said their take over from the British showed him how Asians were also capable of leading themselves.

"The (British) idea of invincibility vanished. From then on I thought we can do what the Japanese have done, that we are also Asians and we can accomplish and govern ourselves."

He also recalled the food shortage and poverty his family experienced then.

"All my brothers lost their jobs. We had to resort to selling bananas on the roadside and things like that.

"I started a small coffee shop and then I sold all kinds of things in the local market."

Asked what he thought of the Malays now, he said they needed to work harder, avoid shortcuts, and plan for the future.

On the legacy he was leaving Malaysia, Dr Mahathir said the cultural legacy was more important than the physical infrastructure.

"The fact that I was able to maintain the racial harmony between the different peoples in Malaysia, that was more important."

Asked if his relationship with his father, who was among the first Malay headmasters of English schools, had any influence on how he ran the country, Dr Mahathir said: "Yes, I think so. He pushed me because he loved me. So the way I push the country is because I love the country."