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Mahathir-Posts

PM ANNOUNCED QUIT DECISION OPENLY TO AVOID CARRY-ON CALLS

KUALA LUMPUR, July 3 (Bernama) -- The Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, said today that he openly announced his decision to quit to avoid people urging him to carry on leading the country and the party.

He said the leaders to whom he confided about his decision to step down urged him to continue holding the posts.

"I have spoken to several leaders and my friends about my wish to step down...I spoke to Khalil (Information Minister Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob) and Pak Lah (Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi) but all those I met asked me to carry on until the end of my life."

"I feel that if I had not openly declared my intention, probably these calls for me to carry on, I cannot shake off, and so I decided to make the statement at the end of the Umno General Assembly," he told a media conference at the air force base in Subang on his return from a vacation in Europe.

Dr Mahathir said in fact he was unable to complete another portion of his announcement as the delegates and leaders shocked by his announcement surged around him and urged him to retract it.

Dr Mahathir also said that in his announcement to step down he wanted to tell the delegates of his wish to give up all posts in Umno and the Barisan Nasional but to remain as the MP for Kubang Pasu.

He wanted to step down as Prime Minister, Finance Minister and from all other posts in the government and the party.

"But I have to continue working in Umno to strengthen the party. That is the statement I wanted to make but I could not do it," he said.

In the announcement also Dr Mahathir said he wanted to name Abdullah as his successor in line with the Umno tradition that the deputy assume the post of president and as head of the majority party in Parliament also the post of Prime Minister.

Asked why he wanted to step down as his leadership was still needed, Dr Mahathir said he had served as Prime Minister for 21 years -- a long period for a Prime Minister.

He wanted to step down in 1998 but postponed it in view of the situation then and also because of the economic slowdown.

"I tried my level best to rehabilitate the party and I feel that the party has been rehabilitated and support for the party is strong once more and so I am not running away from my responsibilities."

"If I had gone too early when the party was weak and facing problems in 1999, it will appear that I was running away from my responsibilities and so I waited for some time."

"Hence it is my hope that I will be able to make a smooth exit...leaving no problems behind and I wish to give an assurance that I will cooperate with the party," he said.

Dr Mahathir said initially he aspired to be Prime Minister at the most six or seven years like his immediate predecessor Tun Hussein Onn.

"But because of the big support and much work that had to be done, I carried on. However one day I have to step down and the people I believe understand and I am thankful that the people did not resort to something bad as I am overwhelmed by their support,."

On the possibility of him contesting in the next general election, Dr Mahathir said, "that we will think about when the time comes."

When asked whether he would leave the political stage all together upon

his retirement next year or he would assume a post like Singapore's Senior Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, he said, " I have already made it very clear that when I leave, I leave completely."

"I'm not hoping to hold any position either in the party or in the government but it is my duty to support the party, to support the government, whatever I may think about the policies of the government that is irrelevant," he said.

Asked why did he broke down when he announced his decision to quit, Dr Mahathir said, "Parting is always a sad thing."

"Having been with the party for 21 years as Prime Minister and party President and having been associated almost three quarters of my lifetime with the party, of course I felt rather sad that I have to make this decision."

"Also it is because I am old so people get a little bit emotional,"

-BERNAMA

RZS HS AAM