

# I'll step down on Oct 31, says Dr M

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**MONACO:** Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday he will step down on Oct 31.

Speaking to the Malaysian press corps accompanying him, the Prime Minister said his decision was final.

He said he could not go back on his word as this would make him lose his credibility.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir had a meeting with Malaysian students studying in France.

Asked about the doubts expressed by certain groups over his intended retirement, Dr Mahathir said:

"Some people think ... he will not step down with so much power at his disposal ... holding such a high position and enjoying life at the top.

"This is because they think that if they were in the place they will not give it up," he said.

Dr Mahathir, who is Umno president, said he would continue to serve the party and campaign during the general election in his capacity as an ordinary member to ensure the party remained in power.

He also believed that there would not be many changes in the party.

"It may not be 100% the same but generally the party will continue its struggle collectively. The party's philosophy had been laid down and this will continue."

Dr Mahathir said he did not think that Umno would become like PAS or a socialist party.

"In fact it was set by the first Prime Minister (Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj) and we have continued with the same policy and I don't think succeeding leaders will change that policy because it will be suicidal to do so," he said.

Addressing the students, Dr Mahathir stressed the importance of Malaysia having a knowledgeable and highly skilled people to continue with the country's development.

He said the Government had allocated 26% of its budget to education and this reflected the Government's earnestness to excel in the field of knowledge.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir launched the Langkawi Yacht Registration facility on board the yacht *Sweet Doll*.

Speaking against a backdrop of super yachts moored at Port Hercules for the Monaco Yacht Show 2003, the most prestigious yacht exhibition in Europe, he said that with the facility, Malaysia was now on the sea charts of the world yachting community.

He said the country had all the natural and cultural attractions to offer the discerning yachting community.

Dr Mahathir said the Langkawi

Yacht Registration, which would be set up on the island very soon, was solely for the purpose of registering yachts.

"Langkawi is a group of 101 beautiful islands. So, just going around Langkawi can be very interesting. There are many unique places in Langkawi itself but all along the peninsula there are also many other unique places, old ports, a Portuguese port and so on," he said.