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Mahathir-Retirement

DR MAHATHIR ENDS CAREER WITH COLOURFUL LAST 100 DAYS

By: P.Vijian

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 31 (Bernama) -- As the final curtain draws on his last 100 days in office, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was still preoccupied with prescribing potent antidotes to Third World countries on how to nurture healthy economies, among other things.

He displayed neither an iota of tiredness nor any sign of boredom even after more than two decades of leading the nation and his swansong was peppered with firebrand vitriolic attacks -- a style that made many like or dislike the vocal doctor-turned-politician.

When not wrestling with his detractors without any mercy in his final days in office, Dr Mahathir, like a flying doctor, from Bangkok to Timor Leste to Papua New Guinea, would be chanting his economic mantra and promising Third World leaders that Malaysia will continue with its pragmatic foreign and economic policies even after his departure.

During the last days of his tenure, he took on himself mammoth tasks ranging from tackling Muslim woes, global economic ills to grappling with a spat with the Jews.

From the pristine RM650-million Putrajaya Convention Centre, specially built to host the 10th Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) Summit, his critical opening speech on the Jews created ripples around the globe -- thereby lobbing the rather dull summit into the international limelight.

Some political observers felt that his remarks that "Jews rule the world by proxy. They got others to fight and die for them," would tarnish his excellent leadership record, but Dr Mahathir did not buckle under any pressure, especially from the critical foreigners.

Neither did his ratings drop at home. Boldly he countered his adversaries: "I am not anti-west but I speak my mind. That is my bad habit. Sometimes I even criticise myself."

His long cherished desire to uplift the lagging Muslim nations did not fade away even towards the end of his career.

At the OIC Summit he urged resource-rich Muslim nations to buck up and develop their poverty-mired economies to overcome pressing domestic quandaries and prepare to compete with the globalised world.

Just a day after taking over the OIC chairmanship Dr Mahathir departed for Bangkok to attend the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) Summit.

There, despite the presence of several prominent leaders, Dr Mahathir captured the audience by vehemently calling for fair trade instead of free trade that could be unfair most times.

He cautioned Apec not to stray from its traditional role -- for which it was formed -- to promote just trade and reduce economic imbalances among member countries.

"Security, military and politics are matters not really for Apec to handle," said the premier.

But even as he spoke on economics at Apec the anti-Semitic tones continued to haunt him. United States President George W. Bush claimed that he rebuked Dr Mahathir but the premier denied any such incident and tagged him a two-faced leader.

For a politician who graduated with a medical degree, however, economics remained a passion and it was obvious during his last regional tour.

At his next stop in Yogyakarta, addressing the Asean Federation of Engineering Organisation, he reminded the world of the dangers of economic

terrorism which is as bad as terrorists because it too can damage thriving economies and impoverish countries.

Next, visiting the newly independent Timor Leste, one of the world's poorest nations with less than a million population, Dr Mahathir gave an assurance of Malaysia's assistance to rebuild the country.

Later, with a team of trade delegates he visited Papua New Guinea and agreed to help modernise the country.

Upon his return to Malaysia, he addressed the People's Progressive Party's 50th Annual General Assembly the following day and urged the people to continue doing things the Malaysian way -- simply because that was what brought unity and prosperity to the nation.

Without a noble culture, he cautioned that knowledge gained could ruin societies.

As Dr Mahathir wrapped up his political career today, he ended a colourful era that had mesmerised politicians, economists and the layman.

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