

27 SEP 2003

Mahathir-Post

DR MAHATHIR STEPS DOWN OCT 31

By: Jackson Sawatan

MONACO, Sept 27 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today 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.

"Rumours...we cannot avoid particularly from the opposition... like PAS has been saying that he will not resign...how many times their predictions did not come true," he said.

Dr Mahathir said PAS had also made several other predictions that the Budget to be tabled would be an election budget...

"Each time we table the budget, they say it is a budget for election...three budgets have been tabled. This time their prediction is correct because after the (2004) Budget we can't avoid having an election)," 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 per cent the same but generally the party will continue to 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 per cent of its budget to education and this reflected the government's earnestness to excel in the field of knowledge.

The Prime Minister advised Malaysian students overseas to concentrate on increasing their knowledge and skills and then return home to help develop the country.

-- BERNAMA

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