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Mahathir-Power

"I WOULD HAVE STEPPED DOWN EARLIER IF..." SAYS DR MAHATHIR

By: Azman Ujang

DAVOS (Switzerland), Jan 23 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he would have stepped down earlier if he had been able to achieve his objectives for Malaysia and its people.

"But a lot of things happened that prevent you from stepping down when you really want to step down," he said in an interview in the inaugural issue of the "Global Agenda" magazine published by the World Economic Forum, which meets here for six days beginning today.

Dr Mahathir, who has been the Prime Minister for 22 years and is due to step down in October, was asked whether he had been in power for too long.

Asked if he was concerned that he had been a crutch for Malaysia and Malaysians who perhaps worry how they will be able to carry on without him, he said: "I don't think I'm a crutch. I know I belabour a lot of people whenever they failed or they don't come up to my expectation. I say nasty words to people, so I don't think they can depend on me as a crutch very much."

To another question, he said he would not retire completely from politics after stepping down as prime minister.

"Not completely because I've pledged I'll continue to support the party (Umno) and I ensure the succeeding government will remain strong.

"I will go down and meet the people, and talk to them, and tell them why they should support the government."

But, Dr Mahathir said, he would not necessarily play his role in any official capacity.

"I've sufficient standing in the party to be able to move around and meet party members without holding any position," he said.

Asked what he felt were the root causes of the Sept 11 attacks against America, he said this was due to the conflict and impressions by Muslims that they were being oppressed, particularly in Palestine.

"Whether it is correct or not correct it is irrelevant because it is their impression. And they feel that Palestinians in particular have been treated very unfairly. They are being killed, their land has been taken away from them and generally for the last 50 years they have been living as refugees," he said.

Dr Mahathir said this created a feeling not only among Palestinians but also a lot of people sympathetic to them that they had to hit back in some way.

"Their choice is to resort to terror tactics. But what are their options? They cannot fight against conventional war, against their oppressors."

The prime minister also said he thought that Muslims were generally mistreated.

"I think this impression is gaining rather than diminishing because since Sept 11 (Israeli Prime Minister) Ariel Sharon has gone all out to counter-terrorise terrorists to increase act of terror against the Palestinians," he said.

Dr Mahathir pointed out that Muslims should condemn terrorism because it was against the teachings of Islam.

But, he said in the case of the Palestinians: "We find it difficult to condemn them because we are not in a position to go to war against Israel or other oppressors and the Palestinians are left to fight for themselves."

He said they had no choice but to act the way they were acting.

The prime minister was also asked on the kind of democracy being practised in Malaysia.

"Malaysia is a democratic (country) in a sense that the voice of the majority counts," he said, adding that the most important thing about democracy was that the government was elected by a majority of the people.

On the pegging of the ringgit at RM3.80 to a US dollar, Dr Mahathir, who is also the Finance Minister, said the move had given Malaysia an advantage over all of its competitors.

This is because people who do business in the country know that they can expect to draw up a budget and at the end of the year, they do not have to take into account fluctuation in the value of the currency, he said.

-- BERNAMA

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