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PM: I don't need to boost my popularity

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PUTRAJAYA, Tues. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that his recent remarks about Europeans and the need for Malaysians to study the Anglo-Saxon civilisation was a factual and necessary reminder, and not an attempt to boost his popularity.

The Prime Minister said there was no need to boost his popularity as he was stepping down.

"The Europeans must accept that while they can be critical of others, others, too, can be critical of them," he said when asked to comment on an Asian Wall Street Journal article, which criticised him for his strong remarks about Europeans at the Umno general assembly last week.

"All that I said were factual; there was no bias or anything like that. We have to know who they are in order to deal with them. They are not going to say things about themselves that are relevant to us, we have to do so.

"As far as popularity is concerned, I'm on my way out, I don't need any popularity any more.

"In October I will not be the Prime Minister, I will not be the president of the party (Umno). Why should I care whether I'm popular or not?

"I'm not popular with the Press, the Western Press, (and) I don't propose to do things to be popular with the Western Press."

The AWSJ article, published yesterday in the opinion page, criticised Dr Mahathir as trying hard to boost his popularity with such remarks.

The newspaper had recently made an "unintentional" blunder by publishing an international terrorist's picture and captioning it as that of Dr Mahathir.

Yesterday's article indirectly hinted at the US' possible future role in Malaysia. Two paragraphs at the end of the article read:

"The Prime Minister professes to believe that after he is gone, Malaysia might somehow give up its sovereignty and fall under the yoke of American 'neo-colonialists'.

"That's ridiculous, and Dr Mahathir must know it. The real danger is that the country could sink into a morass of religious extremism and racism, and that's precisely where American leadership in the world can be of help."

Asked whether Malaysia might need the help of "American leadership" to address extremism in the future, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia was capable of handling terrorism and extremism in its own backyard.

"We can deal with our own extremism, we don't need any interference," he said.

On fears about foreign investors avoiding the country since his remarks were being used by certain Western media to antagonise investors and Western Governments, Dr Mahathir said he was confident the investors knew what was good for them.

"No, it will not affect (investment). Foreign investors know this country very well. We treat them as foreign investors and we listen to their problems and we trust them.

"They have been coming to this country all the while and I've been critical of their countries. I'm not against their people, I'm against their policies."