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PM: Some still doubt me (HL)

Patrick Sennyah; Chow Kum Hor

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today there were people who still doubt he will retire in October while some want him to step down earlier.

"I do not know why," he said at a Press conference after opening the 57th MIC annual general assembly at Putra World Trade Centre (See also P4-5).

"Some say that I should go now ... they do not believe that I will step down in October.

"That's their opinion. They are always ready to be suspicious of me and have never been supportive of me anyway."

He said these were all speculations and he would stand by his earlier statement that he would not lead the Barisan Nasional in the next general election.

"I will continue to fully support the BN, but the new BN chairman is the one who will lead it into the next general election," he added.

"In politics, we get all kinds of things."

Last year, Dr Mahathir stunned the nation when he announced at the close of the Umno general assembly that he would be stepping down as the Prime Minister and Umno president.

Shocked Umno and government leaders persuaded him to reconsider and Dr Mahathir then agreed to retire in October after the Organisation of the Islamic Conference summit in Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir, who is also the BN chairman, urged component parties to put aside all internal problems and focus on ensuring a landslide victory in the next general election.

Acknowledging that there were minor differences among members of some BN component parties, he said these should not be an obstacle. All parties should instead stand solidly behind the coalition.

"The MIC has successfully managed to resolve its problems and I think it is time for all other component parties to set aside their differences and focus on the general election."

Dr Mahathir said he had not made up his mind when the general election should be held.

"I want to keep you guessing ... that is more fun. Otherwise you have nothing to think about," he said with a smile.

On the role of pro-BN Indian parties which have not been admitted into the coalition, he said they should be patient and continue supporting the BN.

On requests by the MIC to increase the Government's allocation to Tamil schools, Dr Mahathir said the Government had already given a lot of assistance to these schools and based on their past performances, Tamil schools in the country have progressed tremendously.

On the visit by German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder to Malaysia tomorrow, Dr Mahathir said Germany had been investing a lot in the country over the last few years and was the largest European investor in Malaysia last year.

"We hope to foster better relations with Germany which has also expressed its willingness transfer technology."

Schroeder will be the first German Chancellor to visit Malaysia.