

Analysts on why Mahathir should stay for Apec

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PETALING JAYA: Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's, position as an elder statesman is needed as leverage on negotiations on international trade pacts during the hosting of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) summit next year, says a socio-political analyst.

Politics and international relations expert Assoc Prof Lai Yew Meng of Universiti Malaysia Sabah said the decision to hand over the reins to his successor only after the Apec summit in November 2020 is a strategic one.

"It is crucial to ensure Malaysia is able to maximise the outcome of hosting the summit, with Dr Mahathir leveraging on his position as not only the Prime Minister but also a senior and well-respected

statesman in the Asia-Pacific region.

"The continuous stabilisation and progress of the Malaysian economy during the next 11 months or so would serve as an important barometer in enhancing confidence towards Malaysia among Apec's member states and the business community," Lai said.

He was commenting on Dr Mahathir's revelation on Tuesday that he would think of handing over the premiership to Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim - as agreed to by the Pakatan Harapan parties - only after the next Apec summit.

(Apec is an inter-governmental forum for 21 Pacific Rim member economies that promote free trade throughout the Asia-Pacific region. Malaysia previously hosted it in 1998.)

Lai added that apart from the privilege and honour of being the

only leader of an Apec member state to chair the summit twice, Dr Mahathir's reputation, experience and statesmanship would be an asset during negotiations.

"His statesmanship could be leverage for younger leaders in the region to the possible advantage of Malaysia during negotiations. I believe that continuity would be Malaysia's position and policy with regard to Apec, even if there were a leadership or power transition.

"Asean, and by extension Apec, or any other proposed intra or inter-regional trade blocs such as RCEP and CPTPP, is crucial to ensuring the sustainability of Malaysia's economic growth since ours is an export-oriented economy which requires greater access to markets as well as trade and investment opportunities," he said.

(The Regional Comprehensive

Economic Partnership or RCEP is a proposed free trade agreement in the Asia-Pacific region between the 10 Asean member states and their five free trade agreement partners while the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership or CPTPP, also known as TPP-11, is the revamped Trans-Pacific Partnership.)

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia's Institute of Ethnic Studies director Prof Datuk Dr Shamsul Amri Baharuddin said regardless of whether Dr Mahathir stays as PM or not, he must be present during the summit.

"Apec is an international political game show where all Asia-Pacific leaders meet. For that reason Malaysia as host needs Dr Mahathir. As a senior statesman in the group, he should be present.

"The leadership transition is a

domestic issue and it would not affect Apec," said Shamsul Amri.

Think tank Institut Darul Ehsan deputy chairman Prof Datuk Dr Mohammad Redzuan Othman said on the domestic front, Dr Mahathir wanting to stay on until the Apec summit does not spell good for the voters as it may signal a reneging of promise to hand over to Anwar.

"I do not think Anwar can wait until the Apec summit," added Prof Redzuan, without elaborating.

In an interview with Reuters which came out on Tuesday, Dr Mahathir said he would honour his promise to hand over power to Anwar but not before the Apec summit because the change would be disruptive ahead of the major meet.

Asked if a handover could come in December 2020, Dr Mahathir said: "We'll look at that when the time comes."