

PM'S TOUR HAS GOT OPPOSITION WORRIED

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's nation-wide tour is attracting thousands of Barisan Nasional members. Opposition parties, particularly the DAP and PAS, are also following these gatherings very closely and are worried.

Dr Mahathir's tour, which was first viewed by opposition members as an attempt to restore lost credibility, has gained momentum and is seen as an effective way of countering issues against the Barisan Nasional.

In response, PAS has increased its attacks on Umno leaders and is holding parallel gatherings coinciding with Dr Mahathir's visits, albeit on a very much smaller scale.

The Prime Minister and Barisan chairman has se-

verely criticised both PAS and the DAP in his tour, which has covered four States so far.

And in at least three of these States — Kedah, Negri Sembilan and Malacca — PAS has held ceramahs on the same day as Dr Mahathir's visit to rebut all his attacks against the party and, at the same time, repeat its stand on the issues which Umno says are dividing Muslims.

In Kedah, where PAS has a strong following, party deputy president Ustaz Fadzil Noor held a ceramah at Tunjang, near Alor Star, the same night Dr Mahathir attended a gathering there.

The PAS ceramah, which was attended by several hundred people, heard recorded excerpts of Dr Mahathir's speech earlier and

Ustaz Fadzil rebutted the claims made against PAS.

In Malacca, after Dr Mahathir's address to a large crowd at the Batu Berendam airport in the afternoon, PAS held a ceramah at a village just outside town.

The main speaker at the gathering was Youth exco member Haji Khalid Samad — an upcoming PAS leader.

He criticised Umno leaders in his two-hour talk which was frequently punctuated by shouts of *Allahu Akbar* from the crowd of about 300.

He also reminded PAS members not to forget that they were involved in a *ji-had* (holy war).

Haji Khalid reiterated the PAS stand that Ibrahim Libya and his supporters who died in the Memali incident

were martyrs.

He said "government ulamaks" from the Kedah Religious Affairs Council, who passed a *fatwa* saying that those killed were not martyrs, were motivated by greed and self interest and were not knowledgeable enough to pass such a *fatwa*.

The same message was relayed at Ustaz Fadzil's ceramah in Alor Star and in Palung, Negri Sembilan.

While PAS is just beginning to get a foothold in Malacca and Negri Sembilan, and poses no threat to the Barisan there, it is doggedly following the Prime Minister's visits and ensuring he knows of their presence.

Another indicator of PAS trying to flex its muscles were the boards put up along the route which Dr

Mahathir took on his visit to Masjid Tanah yesterday.

Dr Mahathir remarked that the boards, which read *Kami Menyokong Parti Allah* (We Support Allah's Party) against a backdrop of the PAS symbol, were probably put up only the previous night.

PAS has some influence in the area but two weeks ago, when party vice-president Ustaz Hadi Awang attended a ceramah there, no such posters or boards were seen.

And the ceramahs in Alor Star and Malacca, in which loudspeakers were used, also defied the lawmen. It is learnt that no police permits were issued.

To the DAP, the Prime Minister's tour is seen as a campaign platform for the general election, which

DAP secretary-general Lim Kit Siang says will be held in early May.

Although the crowds at some of the State visits were not up to expectations of Barisan leaders, the wide media coverage and the contact with the people at a time when the Opposition claims that Government credibility is at its lowest has both PAS and the DAP worried.

The DAP rebuts Dr Mahathir's criticisms made at each visit and is now planning to get an injunction to stop the mass gatherings.

Barisan Nasional sources say that Dr Mahathir will, during the course of his visits over the next two months, use the opportunity to dispel and defuse issues exploited by the opposition parties.