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KUALA LUMPUR, APRIL 9 (BERNAMA)

-- THE SABAH STATE ELECTIONS NEXT MONTH WILL BE A FREE CONTEST AMONG THE POLITICAL PARTIES THERE BECAUSE THIS IS THE BEST WAY OF DETERMINING WHICH PARTY WILL GOVERN THE STATE, BARISAN NASIONAL (BN) CHAIRMAN DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD SAID TODAY.

HE SAID BN WOULD NO LONGER INTERVENE IN THE POLITICAL AFFAIRS OF SABAH UNTIL THE OUTCOME OF THE ELECTIONS ON MAY 5 AND 6.

SPEAKING TO REPORTERS AFTER CHAIRING A BN SUPREME COUNCIL MEETING AT MENARA DATUK ONN AT THE UMNO COMPLEX HERE, HE SAID THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT WOULD ENSURE THE ELECTIONS WERE CONDUCTED FAIRLY.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR, WHO IS THE PRIME MINISTER, STRESSED THAT THE COMING ELECTIONS WOULD NOT AFFECT THE SECURITY OF THE STATE AND PEOPLE OF SABAH.

HE SAID BN'S SOLE REPRESENTATIVE IN SABAH, THE BERJAYA PARTY, WOULD FIELD CANDIDATES IN ALL 48 STATE CONSTITUENCIES AS MIGHT ALSO THE OTHER CONTESTING PARTIES. -- MORE

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THE RULING PARTI BERSATU SABAH (PBS) WHICH AFTER THE LAST STATE ELECTIONS AND A NUMBER OF SUBSEQUENT BY-ELECTIONS WON 28 SEATS HAD DECIDED TO CONTEST ALL SEATS AND THIS WAS CONVEYED TO DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR PERSONALLY BY PBS PRESIDENT AND SABAH CHIEF MINISTER DATUK JOSEPH PAIRIN KITINGAN WHEN THEY MET HERE TODAY.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID THE PBS HAD WITHDRAWN ITS APPLICATION TO JOIN THE BN, AND, WITH THIS, THE STATE ELECTIONS NEXT MONTH WOULD BE A FREE FOR ALL AMONG THE CONTESTING PARTIES.

HE SAID THAT AS A RESULT OF THE PBS DECISION, THE BN PHILOSOPHY OF FAIR DISTRIBUTION OF SEATS AMONG THE VARIOUS COMMUNITIES IN THE COUNTRY AIMED AT BRINGING ABOUT STABILITY COULD NOT BE ACHIEVED IN SABAH SO FAR.

HE SAID BN WAS PREPARED TO ACCEPT THE CONCEPT OF A COALITION GOVERNMENT AMONG THE THREE MAIN PARTIES OF BERJAYA, USNO AND PBS IN SABAH AS A STEP TOWARDS REALISATION OF THIS CONCEPT.

+HOWEVER, IT LOOKS LIKE THE BN HAS MET WITH A DEAD-END IN EFFORTS TO REALISE THE CONCEPT THROUGH NEGOTIATIONS. THE RESOLUTION OF THE POLITICAL CONFLICT IN SABAH APPEARS TO LIE IN THE STATE ELECTIONS.+ -- MORE

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+WE TRIED TO PROMOTE THE BN CONCEPT OF POWER-SHARING BUT IT APPEARS THE PBS ON ITS PART COULD NOT ACCEPT THIS,+ THE PRIME MINISTER SAID.

HE ALSO EMPHASISED THAT THE CURRENT POLITICAL CONFLICT IN SABAH WAS NOT A CONFRONTATION BETWEEN MUSLIMS AND CHRISTIANS BUT SOLELY A POLITICAL CONFLICT OVER WHO SHOULD FORM THE GOVERNMENT.

ASKED WHETHER ANOTHER WAY OF RESOLVING THE CRISIS COULD BE FOUND LATER, DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID THERE WAS NONE EXCEPT THROUGH THE PROCESS OF ELECTIONS.

THE BN SUPREME COUNCIL MEETING TODAY DID NOT DECIDE ON THE NEXT LINE OF ACTION AFTER THE ELECTIONS, BUT CONFINED ITSELF TO CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID THE SITUATION IN SABAH WAS VERY FLUID, CHANGING FROM MINUTE TO MINUTE.

HE ALSO EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE IN BERJAYA ACHIEVING SATISFACTORY SUCCESS IN NEXT MONTH'S STATE ELECTIONS IN SABAH. -- BERNAMA  
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