

Snap elections in early May?

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By VONG NYAM MING

THE hasty passage of the Elections (Amendment) Bill in the Senate and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's audience with the Yang di-Pertuan Agong in Johore Baru yesterday has lent strength to talk of snap elections in early May.

The Elections (Amendment) Bill and the Elections Offences (Amendment) Bill were passed in about half an hour. Three senators spoke on the Bills yesterday, the second last day of sitting.

After the Bills are accorded Royal Assent and gazetted, they become law.

If the government gazettes the Bills within the next day or two, the Prime Minister can advise the Yang di-Pertuan Agong to dissolve Parliament, setting in motion the process for the holding of general elections.

If the government opts for snap elections, the earliest it can hold one is 14 days after the dissolution of Parliament, the minimum period of time required under the amended law. And, May 3 has long been speculated as the most likely date.

The various Menteri Besar and Chief Ministers are also likely to advise their respective Sultans and Governors to dissolve the state assemblies for state elections.

State and federal elections in Peninsular Malaysia have traditionally been held simultaneously.

It is understood that the Umno political bureau, comprising Dr Mahathir, Encik Anwar Ibrahim (Umno Youth), Datin Paduka Rafidah Aziz (Wanita Umno), and Umno vice-presidents Datuk Abdullah Badawi,

Datuk Seri Wan Mokhtar Ahmad and Encik Ghafar Baba met on Wednesday night.

Dr Mahathir flew to Johore Baru in the executive Lear jet for an audience with the Yang di-Pertuan Agong yesterday before leaving for a two-day official visit to Labuan, the last stop of his nationwide tour.

The Prime Minister arrived at the Sultan Ismail Airport in Senai at 9.45 am and proceeded immediately to Istana Bukit Serene. He left for Labuan at 11.20 am. He is expected to hold a news conference in Labuan before returning to Kuala Lumpur this evening.

The purpose of the audience is not known but it is not unusual for the Prime Minister to brief the King on the weekly Cabinet meetings. The

last meeting was held on Wednesday.

In 1982, the Prime Minister announced the dissolution of Parliament while he was in Kuching.

The return over the weekend of former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Musa Hitam from a self-imposed temporary political exile in London fuelled stock market rumours yesterday morning that elections were round the corner.

Datuk Musa will convene today a meeting of the Segamat Umno division of which he is chairman, visit his constituency in Kota Tinggi and attend a meeting of the Johore Umno liaison committee.

If elections are called in early May as has been widely speculated, it will not be the first time the government has sought a

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fresh mandate before its full five-year term.

The Barisan Nasional government has up to April 1987 before it needs to go to the people for a new mandate.

Barisan Nasional and Umno executive secretary Kib Bahadun is reported to have said the coalition is ready for general elections.

All the 132 Umno divisions have been directed to draw up their *ceramah* schedules.

Umno information chief Senator Datuk Haji Hussein Ahmad said yesterday, after a special briefing to 200 Umno divisional and branch information officers at Menara Datuk Onn, that divisions had been directed to prepare their schedule for *ceramahs* to cover a two-week period.

He said the schedule should be submitted immediately to Umno headquarters.

Datuk Haji Hussein also said the divisions had been told to begin mobilising their information machinery to prepare for general elec-

tions.

He said Umno headquarters needed the *ceramah* lists to organise the schedule for the speakers in the election campaign.

"The Umno machinery is now geared to face an election ... we are just waiting for the date to be announced," he told reporters.

Datuk Haji Hussein said Umno headquarters has 1,400 speakers throughout the country ready to begin campaigning immediately after nomination day.

One reason cited for general elections to be held before the Sabah polls scheduled for May 5 and 6 is to prevent its outcome affecting the voting trend elsewhere. The PBS is widely expected to repeat its victory of last April.

Electoral boundaries have been redrawn and when the present Parliament is dissolved, the Elections Commission will have to organise polls for 177 Parliamentary seats and 351 State Assembly seats in Peninsular Malaysia.