

POLLS POSER

SPECULATIONS OF EARLY GENERAL ELECTION AS PM CALLS ON THE KING

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By SHAH A. DADAMEAH

JOHORE BARU, Thurs. — Prime Minister **Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad** flew in here this morning and had a 30-minute audience with the King fuelling speculations that he was seeking Royal consent for a dissolution of Parliament.

Dr Mahathir was met at the Sultan Ismail airport by Mentri Besar Datuk Abdul Ajib Ahmad, State Exco members, State Secretary Datuk Abdul Rahim Ramli and State Finance Officer Datuk Dr Shahir Nasir. Minutes after the govern-

ment executive jet touched down at about 9.45am, the Prime Minister was ushered into an official State car to meet the King at Istana Bukit Serene.

Datuk Ajib and the rest of the accompanying State officials waited at the airport until Dr Mahathir returned at about 11.15am.

The King, who is also the Sultan of Johore, personally drove Dr Mahathir back to the airport in a white Ferrari after granting him a 30-minute audience.

Datuk Ajib and the waiting officials sent Dr Mahathir off minutes later. The Prime Minister left for a two-day official visit to Labuan in the last stop of his nation-wide tour.

Sources believe that Dr Mahathir advised the King to dissolve Parliament to pave the way for an early election.

They said the election could possibly be held either on May 3 or May 10.

The sources said this was because Dr Mahathir's impromptu call on the King coincided with the last leg of his nationwide tour which is generally seen as a prelude to his official elections campaign.

It also comes at a time when the Dewan Negara is scheduled to adjourn after its meeting tomorrow, they said.

The sources said other indicators of an election in May are that:

● ALL Umno divisions had been instructed last week to submit their candidates list by this week. They were also instructed to print their posters and handbills for the general election;

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Signs that the general election may be in May

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DR. DR. MAHATHIR - (P)

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● ALL Barisan Nasional component parties, of which Dr Mahathir is chairman, had been told over the last two weeks to expect an election soon. They were also told to finalise their candidates;

● THE feedback from the Prime Minister's nationwide tour showed that there was widespread support for the coalition;

● THE Government Printers had already printed the new simplified nomination papers in accordance with the amendments to the Elections (Amendment) Act in the current sitting of Parliament;

● MANY Ministers, MPs and Assemblymen had been directed by their respective party and State Liaison Committee chiefs to return to their constituencies and lay the groundwork for an election; and

● DR MAHATHIR has resolved or given assurances on most of the major issues faced by the Govern-

ment in the last three months.

The sources believe that Parliament would be dissolved this Saturday even though Dr Mahathir had not told MPs and the Cabinet of the election date.

They said it was the Prime Minister's prerogative to fix the election date and he need not discuss it with the Cabinet or party.

The sources said should this be the case, nomination would be on April 26 and polling on May 3.

However, this contravenes the Elections (Conduct of Elections) Regulations 1981 which states that a week must lapse between the date Parliament was dissolved and nomination day, while two weeks must lapse between nomination and polling.

This means the Regulations must be amended but this can be done administratively. The amendment need not be brought before Parliament.

The sources cite two main reasons for a possible May

3 polling date:

● IT WILL be before the fasting month;

● SHOULD the Barisan Nasional be returned with a resounding victory, chances are that it may "influence" Sabah voters psychologically thus inducing undecided voters to vote Barisan Nasional.

Some sources said it was also possible that Parliament may be dissolved on Saturday, nomination fixed for April 26 while polling may be on May 10.

While this combination comes well within the regulations, the sources feel May 10 is an unlikely polling date because:

● MAY 10 is expected to be the first day of *Ramadan* and fixing polling on such an auspicious day will not only offend Muslims in the Opposition but also those in the coalition;

● IT will be after the Sabah State election and if the Barisan does badly in the State election, it may have a negative effect on voters in the Peninsula;

● MAY 11 is the 40th anniversary of Umno's founding and if the Barisan does not perform up to expectations, it would be a dampener on the celebrations.

Datuk Ajib told newsmen after Dr Mahathir left for Kuala Lumpur on his way to Labuan: "This trip (by the Prime Minister) is supposed to be a quiet visit. You are not supposed to be here — it was supposed to be *that quiet*."

Asked why the Prime Minister was seeking an audience with the King, he said: "He saw it fit to drop by here, on his way to Labuan, to pay a courtesy call on the King."

He added: "Even if I knew, I cannot tell you."

State officials said they were also "caught off-guard" with the unexpected directive to be at the airport.

In Labuan, Dr Mahathir left the airport immediately on arrival and newsmen did not have an opportunity to ask him about the speculations.