

TWO-TIER ELECTIONS?

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By K.T. ARASU

LABUAN, Fri. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said that it is possible to hold separate elections for Parliament and the State Assemblies.

He also did not discount the possibility of elections being held during the fasting month.

"I have to consult leaders of other Barisan Nasional component parties first. It will take time. We are in no hurry," he told reporters at the end of a two-day visit here, the last leg of his nationwide tour.

Dr Mahathir said the elections could only be held after issues confronting Malaysians were cleared.

To further questions on this, he said: "These issues have largely been cleared. What can be cleared has been cleared."

He was apparently referring to his assurances on the review of the Education Act regarding the existence of vernacular schools, the White Papers on Memali and the BMF loans scandal, promise of

more jobs and other major issues.

On his meeting with the Yang di-Pertuan Agong yesterday, Dr Mahathir said it was over certain administrative matters.

He said he had to report these matters to the King.

Newspapers reported today that Dr Mahathir could have sought royal assent for the dissolution of Parliament, paving the way for a May general election.

Dr Mahathir said the Press had been speculating on the election date by eliminating "the improbable dates."

"You say it cannot be held during the fasting month, Hari Raya Puasa, my birthday or the birthdays of other Ministers.

"Based on your eliminations, there can only be two days for the elections to be held."

But he added that "everything that is not against the law is possible ... even holding elections during the fasting month."

He also did not discount the possibility of separate elections for parliamentary and State seats.

He said: "This sort of speculation is all right, so long as it is not on the stock market."

Dr Mahathir said he was confident that the Barisan would win comfortably in the elections.

"If I don't have any confidence ... very difficult to lead. I can't very well tell you I'm going to lose."

Asked about the 20 parliamentary seats which will be contested in the Sabah election, Dr Mahathir admitted that the Barisan would "quite definitely lose some seats."

"We can't win them all. You win some, you lose some," he said.

He explained that in the past, Kelantan (under PAS rule) did not give the Barisan any seats but added that the coalition still did quite well.

On how he intended to resolve the Sabah problem, Dr Mahathir said: "We'll wait and see."

On the candidate for Labuan, the Prime Minister said the candidate would most likely be a local.

However, most of the people in Labuan supported the Barisan and would, therefore, back its candidates, he added.

Dr Mahathir was satisfied with the development in Labuan even though its growth has been slower recently because of the recession.

He said the island's potential as a tourist destination had not been tapped fully and added that the Tourist Development Corporation should promote Labuan as a major tourist destination.