

Dr M: Greater threat from within Barisan

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SEREMBAN, Sat. — The Barisan Nasional faces a greater threat in the next general election from the internal strife of its component parties and members rather than from an opposition onslaught, Datuk Seri ~~Dr Mahathir Mohamad~~ said today.

The Barisan chairman said bickering among party members over the candidates and between component parties were major problems that could threaten the coalition.

He said these problems were caused by those who did not serve the interest of the party.

However, Dr Mahathir said he was confident that there was "no problem" in

resolving the internal fighting.

"The Barisan is not the only party affected by this internal quarrel, even PAS has got this problem... even Lim Kit Siang's dictatorial attitude of the DAP has caused problems within his party.

"This problem is not major and can be solved but it poses a greater threat to the Barisan compared to any challenge that the opposition may offer," the prime minister told a press conference after two closed-door sessions with Umno branch leaders and local Barisan leaders.

Dr Mahathir, who has been visiting various

parts of the country, said the tour was to identify such problems and resolve them.

"I am also touring the country to see the preparations of the Barisan, particularly Umno's machinery for the general election," he added.

On the general election, Dr Mahathir said that although he was very confident the Barisan would perform well, he needed "to be more than very confident" before he would call for elections.

"We cannot call for the general election just because the conditions are right and we can win.

"Elections are not a matter to fool around

with. Usually an election is held every five years. It is not good that each time we feel we can win or that the condition is right, we call for an early election," he added.

Dr Mahathir said he wanted to "time" the election and also to allow the Government enough time to fulfil its commitment.

He also said that the Barisan had not made any

decision on the candidates.

"We have not reached that stage. There is plenty of time, we have more than a year until October 1991," he added.

On the chances of the Barisan in Negri Sembilan, the prime minister said the coalition could win the seats in the state.

Dr Mahathir also spoke about the relations be-

tween the Federal Government and Sabah and Sarawak and said they were very good.

He dismissed speculation that ties with Sabah were strained following the arrest of Sabah Foundation director Datuk Dr Jeffrey Kitingan, brother of Chief Minister Datuk Seri Joseph Pairin Kitingan, on corruption charges last month.

"My relations with Sabah and Sarawak are very good. In fact, Datuk Seri Pairin met me just two days ago.

"We have rule of law in this country. We even take action against our own party members.

"We do not take action only in Sabah. We do it even in the peninsula," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he would be visiting Sabah and Sarawak as part of his nationwide tour to meet local Barisan leaders on preparations for the general election.