

PM: Steps are being taken to solve BN squabbles

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KUANTAN, Tues. — Measures are being taken to solve the internal problems faced by Barisan Nasional component parties before the next general election, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said here today.

The Prime Minister said it was normal for any political party to have some internal problems at any time and "not just at this time."

"There is nothing new about this. We are looking into this but I cannot tell you what are the measures we are taking. We do not want the opposition to know of our strategies," he told reporters after breaking fast at the Menteri Besar's residence here.

"There is nothing exceptional if component parties are having problems. Even the opposition parties are having problems now."

"There is the Al Islah group which has broken away from PAS and I am made to understand that even Semangat 46 is split at the moment ... these problems in any political party are normal."

Dr Mahathir had earlier held a closed-door meeting with Umno Youth leaders in Pahang.

Commenting on a call by PAS leaders to their Muslim supporters not to go for haj this year in anticipation of a general election during the haj season, Dr Mahathir said:

"The timing of the general election does not depend on who will vote. Not all Muslims who go for haj are PAS supporters. There may be more Umno supporters."

"But that is typical of PAS. Its actions have never been very Islamic. They are now asking people to put the party's interests before Islam."

"Stopping people from performing the haj is not Islamic. They are saying that haj can be performed next year but what if a person does not live till next year?"

Dr Mahathir said the Umno Youth machinery for the general election would be mobilised earlier this time to ensure that it would carry out its campaigning more effectively.

"The Youth have a big role to play in Umno's preparations for the elections and after visiting the Youth machinery in Kelantan, Terengganu, Perak and Pahang, I must say that I am satisfied with the groundwork done

so far," Dr Mahathir said.

"In all the states, the Umno Youth has geared up well for the elections except for one state where we found that the Youth wing was not organised enough and the preparations unsatisfactory."

Dr Mahathir did not name the state but said it was a state visited by his deputy, Encik Abdul Ghafar Baba.

He said that during his visit to the four states, he briefed the Umno Youth on the specific roles they would have to play in the elections.

Dr Mahathir said he had not made up his mind on the number of MPs who would be dropped from the Barisan line-up.

"What I have decided so far is the kind of candidates that we will field. Anyone picked will have to fit into the mould," he said.

"For me, a fit candidate is one who strives for the people, nation and party ... one who has experience and exposure and who is popular and who commands respect."

"I have not made any assessment so far as to how many of the present MPs do not fit into this category," he said.