

# We can crack stronghold: PM

KOTA BARU, Fri. — There is no opposition stronghold that the Barisan Nasional cannot penetrate, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said here last night.

"To us, there is no opposition stronghold that we cannot possibly capture," he told reporters at the Sultan Ismail Petra airport here before flying back to Kuala Lumpur after a one-day visit to Kelantan.

"In the 1986 election we were told we could only win 19 seats in Kelantan — someone even said 17 at the most — the rest were said to be opposition strongholds. However, we

got 29 (of the 39 state seats).

"This shows that we cannot identify any area as a stronghold of the opposition, and therefore given up as lost. If we work hard enough, we can capture such seats."

He said Kelantan Umno's prestige had improved and it was ready for the general election.

He said the party's information campaigns had been effective in drawing support.

"Just today, for instance, more than 1,000 PAS members joined Umno in one area alone (Meranti in Pasir Mas) ... Many more PAS people

have also joined us in other places," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he found the local reception for him very encouraging and "not at all hostile."

He said his pre-election tour of the country so far had given him a satisfactory picture of the overall situation.

"My series of visits are to assess preparations for the election and to ensure victory for the Barisan Nasional. I will also meet the people to gauge their mood and stand.

"I feel we are better prepared now for the general election," he said.

Asked if this meant it was time to hold elections,

Dr Mahathir said he could not tell because he wanted everyone (in the Barisan) to continue with their preparations.

He said those who were not ready might be "in for a shock" when the time came.

"We hope to catch the opposition parties by surprise ... Or at least, (we want them to be) more surprised than us!" he quipped.

On the Pasir Mas Umno division — the only one in the country yet to hold its election meeting — Dr Mahathir said it had been running well after being put under the state liaison committee's charge.