

Irreparable harm could result

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# Sabah parties playing with fire, says PM

By K. Bala

**BAGAN SERAI, Sun. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today advised political parties in Sabah to stop fanning anti-Federal sentiments in the current election campaign as this would lead to national disunity.**

Saying that the political parties were playing with fire, the Prime Minister feared that such sentiments could cause irreparable damage to the nation and people.

Dr Mahathir was speaking to reporters at the end of a half-day visit here this evening to look into preparations by the Perak Umno and to address a meet-the-people session at the Sekolah Menengah Bagan Serai padang.

Responding to questions on the anti-Federal sentiments being raised in the run-up to the Sabah polls on July 16 and 17 especially in their manifestos, he said the Federal Government was not happy with such sentiments.

"It is easy to raise such sentiments not only in Sabah but also in other States.

"This would lead to a break-up and disunity in the nation. I would like to advise the political parties to stop

doing so," he said.

Conceding that these issues may have been raised to fish for votes, Dr Mahathir, however, feared that once such sentiments are instilled among Sabahans, it would be difficult to erase them, thereby leading to unhealthy consequences.

Dr Mahathir cited the example of a State, which he did not name, that had wanted to

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pull out from Malaysia but whose move was rejected by the courts.

The Prime Minister asserted that the Federal constitution did not allow any State to withdraw from the Federation.

Replying to a question on the security situation in Sabah, he said it was under control.

If the situation warranted it, additional security forces would be deployed, he said, adding that on the polling dates the forces would be beefed up to ensure Sabahans cast their votes without fear.

On the Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) manifesto, which among other things, called for a review of the Internal

Security Act, Dr Mahathir said the party which is a component of the Barisan Nasional had never raised the matter at Barisan meetings.

"The ISA can be reviewed but it must be understood that a review does not mean abolishing the ISA. The review could mean maintaining it in its present form or strengthening the Act," he said.

On a report by Berjaya president Datuk Harris Salleh that his party would not join the Barisan if it won the State election, Dr Mahathir quipped: "It is not just Berjaya's choice. We (the Barisan) have to meet and decide whether to accept the party."

Responding to a call by DAP secretary-general Lim Kit Siang that a panel of all political parties be set up to discuss the composition of the Commonwealth panel to observe the coming general election, Dr Mahathir replied that he would be meeting the opposition leader.

However, the Prime Minister said the suggestion was preposterous.

"It appears that the opposition leader does not trust the Commonwealth but he has faith in the local Election Watch which is against the Government.

"We (the Government) do not trust Election Watch. Anyway, the Commonwealth has no vested interest and I am perplexed over Kit Siang's reasoning," he said.