

# 'Elections should not be held just because No polls for now, signs are favourable' says PM

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and Syed Nadzri

MUAR, Thurs. — The Government has no immediate plans to hold a general election even though the domestic conditions appear conducive presently, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

The Prime Minister said the Government was not in the habit of staging general elections just because everything seemed to be going its way.

He said elections cost money, adding that polls should not be held just because the signs appear favourable to the Government.

Dr Mahathir said this at a Press conference after a luncheon address to leaders, members and supporters of the Johor Barisan Nasional at the Dewan Jubli Intan here. He was on a one-day visit to Muar.

He was asked to shed some light on speculation in recent weeks that the general election would be held soon. The Parliament's current term expires at the end of next year.

He said that the climate looked conducive for the general election. "There is political stability, there is unity among the races, the economy is doing well, and the rural and urban sectors are also looked after.

"But we shouldn't hold a general election on these grounds alone...the minute we see the possibility of victory, we hold the election...

"An election is held because it is our duty to do so. It is not something that we

should play with."

Dr Mahathir had earlier, in his speech, told the gathering that grass-roots members must discipline themselves well in the event that a general election was held.

He said that no one should take the BN leadership for granted and that they must always strive hard to ensure that the BN continued to rule and bring development to the people.

When asked what else there was that would prevent the Government from holding the general election, Dr Mahathir said the BN had a five-year mandate to rule and would want to make sure that the period was well utilised to bring more development to the people.

Just because the signs seemed favourable to the BN, it did not necessarily mean that the Government had to hold the general election, the Prime Minister said.

Dr Mahathir said: "We're not like some other people where the election is concerned."

In a lighter vein, the Umno president said the election could well be very near or may still be far away. What the BN components should be concerned at the moment was to ensure that their machinery was well prepared at all times.

He was confident that the BN machinery would work very well as shown in the Shahbandaraya by-election in Klang last month. In that

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by-election, the BN defeated two independent candidates to retain the State seat.

He said that during a general election the party machinery must work even harder because the formation of a government was at stake.

Dr Mahathir said it was important that there should not be any disunity among the rank and file in the BN because this would have an effect on the party's strength.

In an election, some people may be chosen, and some not. What was important is for the people to rally round the party and not round the individuals. He said the interest of the party superseded that of the individual, and this had been one of the BN's strong points.

Asked to comment on the high number of Umno members who have not registered as voters, Dr Mahathir said: "I want to appeal to all Umno members who have not registered as voters to do so immediately.

"This is their duty and responsibility. They should register to prove their loyalty to the party."

In his speech, Dr Mahathir said he believed the BN could win the next election provided there was strict discipline among members. There would be no point in declaring support for the party and its leaders if this was not matched by a strong sense of discipline, he said.

Apart from this, the willingness of everyone to support the party's candidates was another vital factor in determining the party's success or failure at the election, he said.

Dr Mahathir also praised the level of leadership shown by Menteri Besar Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, saying that the Umno vice-president's ability was obvious for all to see.

Commenting on the statement made by British Trade Minister Richard Needham who said that the British Government was under pressure to retaliate against the ban on Government contracts for British firms, Dr Mahathir said: "That's their problem ... we are under pressure, too."

Asked whether there was any basis for Needham's statement that the ban would be lifted in the next six weeks, Dr Mahathir said: "I don't know ... he may have information which I don't."

Needham, who had flown in on Saturday for his second meeting with Dr Mahathir in two weeks on Monday, was quoted by Reuters as saying before he returned home: "The longer they (Malaysia) leave it... the more likelihood there is of retaliation by the British side. The longer it goes on, the more voices will be raised against it."

He had also said in the interview that he expected the ban to be lifted, possibly within the next six weeks.

Muhyiddin, in his brief speech at the function, said the party machinery was prepared to carry out its duties at any moment.

He said: "Our record in the State is well known. We've managed to increase the per capita income to RM6,800 from RM3,500 several years ago.

"At this stage, all we're waiting for is a signal from the party leaders to start our work. With the support shown by the Prime Minister, I'm confident we can make a clean sweep of the State seats."

In the 32-seat Johor Legislative Assembly, the DAP holds three seats (Bandar Maharani, Jementah and Bekok) while Semangat 46 holds Parit Bakar.

The gathering with the rakyat was a big occasion here as BN component members came out in full support of the Prime Minister. Dr Mahathir and Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali were greeted by traditional music from the kompang, the lion dance groups and a group of Indian classical musicians.

They left for Kuala Lumpur in the evening.