

PM: TIME RIGHT FOR ELECTIONS

Mahathir tells BN parties to get ready for polls

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MUAR: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad says the time is right for the general election and urged the Barisan Nasional parties to put their machinery into high gear.

The Prime Minister said the present climate was conducive for the Barisan to win convincingly, adding that he would call for elections when "the timing is right."

"It could be near or even regarded as a long way off. What is important is that we should be ready. I cannot announce now when the election is but we should be ready.

"Our machinery is there and can be easily mobilised. But for a general election, it must be activated more aggressively," he said, adding that there was nothing hindering the holding of an election "at this point."

Asked why the election could not be held now since the climate was conducive for the Barisan, Dr Mahathir said the BN could not fool around and hold elections whenever it felt it would win.

"It costs a lot of money. We cannot have an election every time we are sure to win. The term is five years and we want to make the best of it to build the nation.

"We do not have elections for the sake of high positions. We want to form a strong government which serves all races fairly and strives hard towards progress," he told newsmen after speaking to over 5,000 Barisan supporters.

Asked whether Umno had started identifying its candidates, Dr Mahathir said he would like to leave the candidates' list to the last minute.

"If you name candidates now, people would start to cry and look for Muhyiddin (Johor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin) or other leaders to ap-

peal. It becomes difficult. As it is we have a lot of work to do to prepare," he added.

Earlier in his speech, Dr Mahathir said candidates picked to contest on Barisan tickets were only human and had their limitations.

The party, he said, picked candidates who it felt were able and committed, adding that Umno members should uphold discipline and work together to support those picked to contest.

"Umno cannot lose a seat if it is united and everyone wholeheartedly supports those picked. In the past, most of the defeats were due to internal friction and squabbling.

"Umno must be united and strong, being the backbone of the Barisan. If the backbone is not in order, the entire body will be crippled.

"We have ruled for 37 years because we have been united. We cannot say this will go on unless we are disciplined and committed to put party interests above everything else," he added.