

MPs can indulge in business

MEMBERS of Parliament and State Assemblymen will not be prevented from indulging in business, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

This is because their allowances as elected representatives are "not much".

However, the Government will continue its practice of disallowing Ministers, Deputy Ministers, Parliamentary Secretaries and Political Secretaries from being involved in business.

"We don't allow Ministers, Deputy Ministers, Parliamentary Secretaries, Political Secretaries (from doing business) because they hold positions and power in the Government," the Prime Minister added.

Dr Mahathir said this restriction was introduced because the Government did not want Ministers, Deputy Ministers, Parliamentary Secretaries and Political Secretaries from abusing their powers for personal interest.

As for the elected representatives, he said, the most they could do was deliver speeches in the "dewan" (legislative assemblies).

"Why must we stop them from doing business? Their allowances are not much and people keep on asking them for financial assistance. Some ask for jerseys, balls ... this and that ..."

The Prime Minister said this when asked for his views on a popular suggestion forwarded at most political seminars organised by universities calling for elected representatives to stick to their duties and not be involved in businesses as this would cause them to neglect their constituents.

Speaking to reporters at Kubang Pasu, Kedah, after attending a "Pemimpin Ber-

sama Rakyat" gathering at the Sekolah Menengah Hosba, Dr Mahathir said the suggestion could be accepted if the elected representatives were paid well.

"Like Singapore, their Prime Minister is paid S\$130,000, equivalent to RM200,000 a month," he added.

Dr Mahathir said the elected representatives' involvement in business, however, was only part-time.

"Therefore, there is no reason for them not to visit their constituencies besides doing their own work," he added.

Asked to elaborate on his speech at the gathering on the possible general election, Dr Mahathir said the election could be held anytime.

"Anytime, either early, later or middle ... from now until the term of the Parliament expires," he said.

At the gathering, Dr Mahathir said the election would not be held so soon.

However he continued so say that "if the indicator showed it should be held soon, then it should held soon ... If the indicator showed it should be held later, then it will be later."

Asked whether what situation he would consider as favourable for the Government to hold the election, Dr Mahathir said a favourable situation could be anything.

"If we want to consider a favourable situation, this year is favourable, last year is also favourable.

"The thing is we have time to decide when to hold the election. If we hold the election too frequent, every three years or three-and-a-half years, it will consume a lot of funds.

"It means we will be spending a lot of the people's money. We cannot do it frequently. This is not a game, it is a serious matter," he added.

On whether the Government was waiting to ensure that the Barisan Nasional was at its strongest before calling for the election, the Prime Minister said the coalition now is stronger than in the 1990 election.

He said in the 1990 election, the BN were facing with problems caused by the Umno splinter party which many people believed the coalition of opposition parties would affect the BN.

"But this time, their co-operation has loosened although Pas and DAP are still co-operating discreetly," he added.

On claims by leaders of Pas and Parti Melayu Semangat 46 that the Government was afraid of holding the election because the opposition were strong, Dr Mahathir: "They can say whatever they want. It is up to them."