

Dr M parries questions on date for general election

DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad continued to keep the general election date close to his chest despite repeated questions from newsmen yesterday.

The Prime Minister responded in his normal sharp and witty manner to questions urging him to shed some light on possible dates of the general election.

"Any time is an appropriate time to hold the polls for Umno and Barisan Nasional," he said at a Press conference at the end of the three-day Umno general assembly at the Putra World Trade Centre here.

Seated next to him at the conference were Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and general assembly permanent chairman Tan Sri Sulaiman Ninam Shah. Information Minister Datuk Mohamed

Rahmat also attended the Press conference.

Dr Mahathir was asked whether the time was now conducive for the general election, which will be the next major political agenda after the Umno general assembly.

He said even if the conditions were ripe for a general election, it did not necessarily mean that the Government would call for one merely for the sake of holding it.

"We should prolong the tenure of the Government for as long as we could and we will call for polls when we think that we have extended this tenure as much as we could," he added.

Asked whether this means that the election was not likely to be held this year, Dr Mahathir said: "That's possible ... but we have not made a decision

yet. When we do, I'll let you all know."

Asked whether the rainy season would be a factor in determining the election date, he remarked: "That's possible too — floods, school holidays. You are all very smart in assuming that the polls could not be held at such and such a month because of various factors like holidays, meetings.... It looks like I'll have to seek advice from reporters."

Journalists at the Press conference were, however, unrelenting with one seeking to get Dr Mahathir to say when the BN would at least be ready to face the ballot box.

"We are ready," said the Prime Minister. "We are always ready but we cannot announce now when we will go to the polls."

He was then asked wheth-

er he was under any pressure to call for election now since everything was going smoothly for the Government and that he appeared to be riding high after his return from the Apec conference in Jakarta.

He replied: "What you are telling me is that I am under no pressure. How can you say that under such circumstances I am under pressure?"

The journalist then turned to Anwar and asked: "What is the view of the Deputy Prime Minister about this?" But Dr Mahathir interjected, saying: "You can ask him when I am not around."

Another journalist pointed out that perhaps the election would be held this year since the BN Government had always done well in elections held in years end-

ing in even numbers.

"I am not very superstitious. If we are going to lose, whether it is an even year or odd, we will lose. If we are going to win, we will win irrespective of the year. The most important thing is how we conduct ourselves and how we work during the election," he replied.

Asked whether the decorum observed by delegates at the assembly was an indication that the election would be held soon, he said this was not impossible because all delegates, being politicians, have something to do with the election.

Commenting on this year's assembly, Dr Mahathir said the proceedings were very calm and smooth.

The quality of speeches, he added, had also improved with the speakers quoting well-known au-

thorities to stress their points.

Another topic that was raised concerned moves by the Government to review the country's common law system to suit local conditions.

The Prime Minister said this was necessary as the Malaysian common law was now based on the British system.

In Britain, he said, the customs and principles were different and might not be applicable here.

Some British cases, he added, should not be used as precedents by local courts because of differing circumstances.

He added, however, that the local common law system should not be evolved in a way that would cause it to come into conflict with Islam.