

Umno fully geared for general election

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today he was satisfied with the results of Umno's second election dry run, with the exception of one or two areas, and that the party was fully geared for the general election.

The Prime Minister said regardless of whether it was a short or long period of time before the general election, Umno was ready for the polls.

"We have been ready since last year and if we wanted to we could have proceeded (with the election), but we decided not to."

"The results of the party's second election dry run are very good. Most of the

States are all right. There are one or two areas which need to be further streamlined, but generally we are prepared.

"If we want to dissolve Parliament today we can," Dr Mahathir told reporters after chairing a three-hour meeting of the Umno supreme council at the Putra World Trade Centre here.

The second dry run ended on Feb 28 and the various

State liaison committees have submitted their reports to the party headquarters.

He said the party's chances in the election were favourable, but added that it was not a question of merely winning but effectively countering the damage from Pas in the coming election.

The Umno president said he could guarantee that the

opposition party would go all over the place during the election period, spreading lies and making accusations like how he had sold land.

He said Pas leaders spread such lies without any sense of shame or remorse.

Asked about the prospects of a coalition with Pas, Dr Mahathir said it would

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Umno to adopt aggressive style against Pas claims

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depend on whether the opposition party won in the election.

"How to form a coalition Government if they don't win? We will see if they win."

Dr Mahathir said the supreme council also decided that the party would adopt an aggressive approach to counter the wild and baseless allegations, accusations and charges made by Pas leaders and members against Umno.

He said Pas leaders had even gone to the extent of putting fear into their members by claiming that if they joined Umno they would go to hell.

Dr Mahathir said Umno was puzzled over such claims as those who made them were themselves fathered by non-Pas members.

"Does this mean that their ancestors, including their parents, are non-Muslims because they claim that only those who join Pas are Muslims?"

He said the supreme council also did not understand the attitude of Pas leaders who wanted to be referred to as *tok guru* or *ulamak*, but at the same time their behaviour and character did not reflect Muslims of such stature.

Dr Mahathir said Pas members blindly supported their leaders and continued to back those who had committed offences against Islamic teachings, adding that in doing so the party was not adhering to the teachings of Islam.

He said Pas leaders in their *ceramah* were not teaching Islam to their audience, but merely gearing up for the general election.

He said even when a Pas leader was charged with *khalwat* (close proximity), it was not wrong to the mem-

bers who believed their leaders could do no wrong.

Dr Mahathir said their attitude tarnished the image of Islam.

He said even in mosques, tapes containing explanations and speeches by Mohamad Sabu (Pas Member of Parliament for Nilam Puri), who faces *khalwat* charges in the Syariah court, are played before sermons are delivered.

"They do not even respect the mosque as they are preventing other people from fulfilling their obligations to pray in the mosques.

"They are using the mosques for their campaigns," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Pas was formed by disgruntled Umno members who had felt that the Malays were not ready for independence in 1957.

He said even now they accuse Umno members of being *kafir* (infidels) and added that even Kelantan Menteri Besar Nik Aziz Nik Mat had said that Umno was not Islamic.

"What right has he to accuse us of being un-Islamic?"

Dr Mahathir said Umno had and would continue to try and convince the people that Pas teachings are un-Islamic, although he was aware it would take time to succeed.

He said it was up to the people to decide whether the accusations and charges made by Pas leaders were true, adding that it was difficult to convince members who were fanatical.

Dr Mahathir said he had also briefed the supreme council on his visit to Copenhagen and Cambridge. The council members were satisfied and all of them agreed to the restoration of ties with British companies.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysian companies were also

invited to buy, take over or acquire controlling stakes in companies in the United Kingdom to penetrate the European Union market.

Asked about plans to build the army's proposed Special Forces headquarters in Mersing with British funding, Dr Mahathir said there were plans for such a base, but it was not a British one.

"If we want to build it, it should be ours. There is no question of foreign funding. What foreign funding? Per-gau (dam) also they ask so much."

The Prime Minister was responding to a report by the AFP news agency that the Mersing camp was likely to be made available to the Special Air Service Regiment based in Hong Kong after the colony reverts to Chinese rule after 1997.

Umno secretary-general Datuk Mohamed Rahmat, speaking to reporters later, said Dr Mahathir, who is also Barisan Nasional chairman, would deliver the keynote address at a BN convention next Saturday.

Leaders from the various BN component parties would then respond to the Prime Minister's address.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim will present the BN charter for adoption by the gathering before Dr Mahathir closes the convention.

Mohamed said the charter would be a declaration of what the BN stood for, its principles and what it intended to do for the country.

"Since the BN was formed about 20 years ago, it is high time we have a charter, especially for the younger generation, who may not know what the BN stands for."

He said several veteran politicians would be invited to the convention.