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Dr M dismisses speculation of a snap general election

Kamarul Yunus

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday dismissed the notion that he was touring the states to prepare for a snap general election.

"That is what the foreigners think," he told reporters after launching an exhibition in Subang Jaya yesterday.

"I am going around the country to explain the present economic downturn to the people.

"Most people still do not understand why we are talking about an economic downturn when there are people who live in luxury and comfort, (when) prices of commodity such as palm oil and cocoa are better and (when) certain businesses flourish.

"So I need to explain to them and it is better for me to explain to them personally."

Dr Mahathir was asked whether his tour and public rallies held in several states of late were a signal that the general election would be held soon.

In the past two weeks, the Prime Minister had visited Johor, Perak and Penang. He flew to Sabah later yesterday.

His visit to Sabah, he admitted, is specifically aimed at garnering support for the Barisan Nasional for the upcoming state election.

"In Sabah, we are going to have an election and I am going to Sabah now. That is a different matter," he added.

On talk of a rift between him and Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim despite the latter having repeatedly pledged his loyalty to him, Dr Mahathir said he cannot stop people, including the press, from speculating.

"I have nothing (more) to say... as I have said in the past, even if I show people a white paper, they will still think it is black.

"If we say it is white, they will say it is black. The press will also say it is black ... ," he added.

Dr Mahathir was asked to comment on Anwar's statement in Penang on Tuesday. Anwar, who is Umno deputy president and the state's party liaison chief, had said he was not contesting the Umno presidency in the party elections next year and that all divisions in the state would nominate Dr Mahathir to retain the post.

The Prime Minister was later received by Labuan Member of Parliament Abdul Mulok Awang Damit and federal heads of department on arrival at the air force base in Labuan at 6.45pm for a two-day visit to the Federal Territory.

He was accompanied by wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali.

Dr Mahathir would meet Labuan Barisan Nasional (BN) leaders over dinner followed by a closed-door meeting with Labuan Umno leaders.

Today, he will inspect development projects on the island, including the new terminal building of the Labuan airport, and then leave for Kota Kinabalu to start his visit to Sabah.

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