

08/10/1998

PM rules out snap polls `as focus must be on managing economy'

Rashid Yusof

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed.- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today ruled out the possibility of an early general election, saying it is not necessary to spread the limited resources of the country between managing the economy and the elections.

Dr Mahathir said this was because holding an election was a big job when managing the economy also required the Government's full attention.

Further, he said, most people were still behind the Government including the business community.

"My assessment is that people still support the Government. We need to have this Government to handle the problem we are facing when we are still very strong."

At the same time, Umno had been "solid" despite the recent problems while the other Barisan Nasional components were also very supportive of the Government, he added.

Dr Mahathir was speaking at a dialogue at the end of the two-day National Congress on Economic Recovery: The Way Forward, here. A participant had asked the Prime Minister whether the Government would call for snap polls to show the world that the present government still commanded the people's mandate.

"At least not for some time," Dr Mahathir said.

Elaborating on the situation in Umno, Dr Mahathir who is Umno president, said the recent problems had not resulted in any major defection from the party. "Apart from one or two people, the rest are still with the party. Umno is solid," he said.

Also, decisions made by the party were unanimous. Dr Mahathir said the number of members sacked or issued show-cause letters was small compared to its membership of 2.4 million.

In addition, the strength in Parliament, in terms of seats, had not changed very much apart from one seat. "So, we are still very strong," he said.

He said the situation would have been different if there had been wholesale defections from the party.

Dr Mahathir added the 1987 problems were different when there was a substantial shift away from the Government when quite a number of people joined Parti Melayu Semangat 46 and others.

"Not this time. There is no exodus from the party," he said, adding that: "As far as the party is concerned, we see no signs of people not wanting to support the present Government."

(END)