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Mahathir-Election

SABAH ELECTION TO BE HELD AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE, SAYS PM

KOTA KINABALU, 28 Nov (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that the Sabah election will be held "as early as possible".

"As early as possible, we can't go beyond a certain date. We can't go beyond April anyway," he told a news conference at the old Kota Kinabalu International Airport's old terminal building before his departure for the federal capital after a two-day working visit.

Dr Mahathir, who said yesterday that the coming state election would serve as a barometer for the future of the Barisan Nasional, expressed confidence that the BN would win in the election.

"I sense higher spirit and greater unity since my last visit. Everyone is enthusiastic to face the election. This is certainly good for the Barisan Nasional in Sabah," he said.

On how far the Sabah election can be regarded as a barometer for the BN, Dr Mahathir who is BN chairman, said: "To a certain extent of course it is a barometer but it is not necessary a complete measurement of the future of the BN."

The term of the present state government ends on March 18, next year.

Dr Mahathir, who is Umno president, said that so far he had not received the list of candidates from the state Umno to be fielded in the election.

Asked on the possibility that the general election and the Sabah election could be held simultaneously, he said: "We have to consider these things".

On whether the formula on the allocation of seats among Sabah BN component parties is being drawn up, he said: "No, not yet".

Responding to a question on whether there was any truth in talk that some incumbents aligned to Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim may be dropped, Dr Mahathir said he did not know of anybody being aligned to the former deputy prime minister.

Asked on the challenge to the BN to be posed by the Parti Bersekutu led by former Chief Minister Datuk Harris Salleh, Dr Mahathir said that it would not succeed.

"I think it will have no effect. As usual, Parti Bersekutu tries to use money. Previously, Parti Berjaya gave out dividends from borrowed money and when he was defeated, the government had to bear it.

"This time around, he promises to give money to the people of Sabah...we should never make such offers. But he thinks he has nothing to lose by making such offers as he is not thinking of winning," he said.

On the revived issue of the handing over of Labuan to the federal government in the state, Dr Mahathir said: "They (Parti Bersekutu) just want to create an issue".

He also said the federal government would look into the possibility of providing financial assistance for the state's development expenditure.

-- BERNAMA

MAM/JS RM