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Barisan election machinery activated, says Mahathir

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BARISAN Nasional (BN) has activated its election machinery and is ready to face the coming general elections, Prime Minister and BN chairman Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad says.

"We have to prepare from now. The elections can be called anytime, not later than June 2000. BN is ready to face any challenge," he said at a press conference after chairing the BN supreme council meeting in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Dr Mahathir said the meeting saw leaders of BN component parties discussing preparations for the elections, but did not go into naming candidates or allocating seats.

"We must close ranks in the BN to face the elections as a united and strong party. Any misunderstanding between parties or within component parties must be put in the freezer... after the elections they can be defrosted," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the meeting also discussed domestic issues which may be brought up by BN ahead of the elections, including rural development and the economy.

"The rural areas are the stronghold for the BN, and we believe we can address many problems there, including education, so that when the elections are held these problems will be resolved," he added.

The Prime Minister remained elusive when asked if the elections might be called early. "Maybe this year, maybe next year, maybe in two months, three months, four months, five months..."

Dr Mahathir said the campaign period should not be too long as this could lead to tension which is unhealthy.

On whether the registration of 650,000 new voters this year is taken into consideration in deciding the election date, he said: "We will take that into account. From our checks most of these new voters are BN supporters, so it is no problem for us."

To a question, Dr Mahathir said the BN supreme council will hold its next meeting when necessary, but it need not do so to decide on candidates for the election.

"We will decide on the candidates in our own way. In the end, I myself will approve candidates as BN chairman. This has been our practice and when candidates are named, all component parties will close ranks and support whoever is chosen," he added.

BN will celebrate its 25th anniversary this year, and has set up an organising committee for the celebrations, he said. The committee is chaired by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, and comprises Datuk Mohamed Rahmat as secretary, Tun Daim Zainuddin as treasurer, and the leaders of all 14 BN component parties.

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