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Mahathir-Umno (Election)

BARISAN NASIONAL READY TO FACE GENERAL ELECTION- DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, June 20 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad fresh from a successful Umno general assembly said today the Barisan Nasional (BN) is now more than ready to face the general election even if the coalition has to face the opposition candidates on a one-to-one basis.

"One-to-two or one-to-three doesn't matter to us. We will take on everybody," the Prime Minister said when asked if the BN was prepared to take on the opposition on a one-to-one basis in the coming general election.

Speaking at a news conference at the end of the four day Umno general assembly at the Putra World Trade Center here, Dr Mahathir who is also Umno president, said the party would now move forward and prepare for the General Election.

Earlier today Pulau Pinang Parti Keadilan Nasional (Keadilan) liaison chief Dr Mansor Othman was quoted as saying that the opposition parties had agreed that only one candidate representing them would be fielded against the BN candidate representing Umno.

The opposition pact consists of DAP, PAS, Keadilan and PRM.

As the Prime Minister was walking to the room where the news conference was to be held, many Umno delegates and observers expressed their support for him by shouting "Long Live Mahathir" and "Long Live the Malays".

The crowd had to be controlled before Dr Mahathir was able to make his way through the door.

Asked whether Umno was stronger and united in facing the general election, Dr Mahathir said that based on the party's just concluded general assembly the members were now more spirited and determined to defend and champion the party.

"They appeared very solid in responding to my opening speech and at the closing of the assembly," he said.

More than 2,000 Umno delegates attended the assembly, the last for this century and also before the general election.

Their pledge to defend Umno and the leadership made in a loud voice was extraordinary, he said.

The Prime Minister said, "the reception given by the delegates this year is unusual... they are no longer confused.... following the explanation given by me on various issues including on the sacking of Anwar."

Dr Mahathir also said he would visit the various states to get closer to Umno members and the people.

Asked whether the General Election would be postponed until after the Anwar sodomy case was over, the Prime Minister said the Government could not do this.

This was because a General Election would have to be called once every five years, the Prime Minister said.

Replying to another question, Dr Mahathir said the Anwar case in some way would affect the BN election campaign as the explanation on the sacking of Anwar might be considered contempt of court.

He said certain quarters might want to prolong the case to make it difficult for the BN to explain to the people Anwar's sacking should the general election be held while the case was going on.

The Prime Minister also said that he acknowledged the admission by former Umno Youth Chief Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi that Anwar had urged him to raise the nepotism and cronyism issues at last year's Umno General

Assembly. "That is his admission and it looks as though he wants to be retained in Umno and I acknowledge his admission."

--BERNAMA

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