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BN manifesto to focus on making life better for all

Ramlan Said; Sarban Singh

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Solving the problems of the rakyat and providing them with more facilities for a better life - this will be the thrust of the Barisan Nasional election manifesto.

Barisan Nasional chairman and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the manifesto would focus on plans and programmes to bring further progress to the country.

"The document will explain the BN's plans for the future of the country ... solving problems and providing more facilities so that the people will have a better life," he said after chairing a BN supreme council meeting at Menara Dato' Onn.

Dr Mahathir said a committee headed by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi had been set up to draft the manifesto.

Asked whether the committee had been given any deadline, Dr Mahathir quipped: "You want to know the election date, isn't it? Up to Datuk Seri Abdullah. If he is hardworking, we will do it faster but if he is lazy, it will be a bit late."

Earlier, Dr Mahathir had reporters in suspense when he started the Press conference by saying that the election date had been agreed upon, only to add quickly that "it would be held by July 2000".

There was expectation that the Prime Minister would announce the dissolution of Parliament today, as happened in 1995 when he called for the general election after a BN supreme council meeting.

Asked whether the BN would counter the Alternative Front's manifesto announced yesterday, Dr Mahathir said: "They can promise anything, even the heaven, to the people because they know they will lose (and therefore will not have to fulfil the promises).

"For example, they have promised estate workers that they will be paid monthly wages but the ones who have to pay are the employers. Whether employers agree or not, they do not bother to ask ... they just promise. It is easy to promise to give away things belonging to other people."

On the Opposition's manifesto which did not include Pas' struggle to set up an Islamic State, Dr Mahathir said the matter should be viewed together with the party's constitution.

"As the setting up of an Islamic State is in their constitution, we want to know whether Pas will now amend it and drop the idea," he said.

Dr Mahathir said if Pas was willing to do so, then he would be convinced that the party was not trying to hoodwink the DAP, a member of the Alternative Front which had vehemently objected to the setting up of an Islamic State.

To a question on seats to be contested by component parties, Dr Mahathir said although it had not been decided, the allocation would not differ much from the last election.

There might be swapping of seats among the coalition members, he added.

Asked on the Opposition's call to the BN to join it to ensure the coming election was the cleanest in history, Dr Mahathir said:

"They are asking the big one (BN) to join the small one. This cannot happen ... it is difficult. They must know they are only a small party formed (only to contest) in the election.

"BN has been around for 25 years now and it was not formed just to contest the election. It was established to govern the country, unlike the opposition front which was formed only now."

On the Opposition's move to announce its budget on Wednesday, Dr Mahathir replied: "The Government does its Budget with proper planning, like knowing the revenue and funds it has. Only then, we plan our Budget and how we can distribute the money.

"I want to know how the Opposition is going to make such a forecast and the basis used," he said.

On the Opposition's call to the Election Commission for a three-week campaign period, Dr Mahathir said Opposition parties had been campaigning since they lost the 1995 election.

"They have never stopped. They have gone to universities, schools and even kindergartens to influence students and pupils. How much longer do they want? If they want more than five years, it is all right with us. We will then postpone the election until 10 years," he said.

Dr Mahathir was asked about allegations by former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim during his sodomy trial today that First Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin was corrupt.

Dr Mahathir said it was easy for anyone to make allegations.

"We have clear proof that Anwar has plenty of cronies who are filthy rich ... we also know that he used money to bribe Umno divisions to nominate him (to contest) against Tun Ghafar (Baba). We know a lot more of Anwar's wrongdoings. He can try to deny if he wants to," he said.

Dr Mahathir said component parties had been directed to activate their election machinery.

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