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Election-Mahathir

DR MAHATHIR IN ELECTION MODE, SAYS AUSSIE NEWSPAPER

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MELBOURNE, June 24 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is in election mode, according to the Australian Financial Review today.

In an editorial, the newspaper says that after raging at financial speculators and international markets over much of the past two years, "a slightly older version of Dr Mahathir is on display these days as he has sought to win over the once much-maligned foreign media and regain some credibility in the capital markets".

The paper notes that Dr Mahathir appears intent on a quick election to take advantage of the lack of organisation with "the putative new coalition" of opposition parties.

"Malaysia is the last of the troubled Asian economies to go to an election, and the vote is necessary to clear the air about the country's future direction," it says.

"Dr Mahathir's United Malays National Organisation has such a large institutional advantage that the new opposition coalition has little chance of winning.

"The clear discontent with the Anwar (Ibrahim) sacking may only result in the opposition Islamic party winning State governments rather than the opposition coalition making much progress nationally. It would be unfortunate if the Mahathir-Anwar battle only resulted in religious polarisation."

The newspaper says that the most worrying legacy from the Anwar affair, which Dr Mahathir should be repairing, is the reduced credibility of Malaysia's judicial system.

"The Prime Minister was again freely impugning Datuk Anwar's character at the weekend, even though criminal proceedings against Anwar are under way.

"Dr Mahathir looks on Putrajaya as a fitting legacy to a political career that has seen the prime ministership as an engineering job -- pushing projects ahead according to a highly personalised schedule regardless of the economic climate or the social costs.

"But if the Malaysian economy remains burdened in the long term by the failure to restructure the corporate sector and a questionable legal system, the government office complex (in Putrajaya) might equally be seen as a monument to false ambition as it sits alone amid undeveloped old oil plantations south of Kuala Lumpur," the paper concludes.

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