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Dr M: I won't bite Opposition bait

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said he would not be pressured into calling for an early general election.

"I am not a fish. Given bait, I won't bite. I make my own decision at my own time. Don't try to bait me," he told reporters after launching the Siemens Future Lab at the Kuala Lumpur City Centre.

He was asked to comment on calls by the Opposition for an early election to prove that Barisan Nasional was confident of winning.

Dr Mahathir said there was plenty of time to call for the general election.

"We don't hold elections for the sake of holding elections. We can keep them running until they are restless. We are not running, we are just marking time," he added.

Dr Mahathir, who is Barisan Nasional chairman, said despite efforts by the Opposition parties to hoist flags throughout the country, they would not win the election.

"We'll see how many flags they can put up. Their flags will be in shreds before the election. And they will have no more flags to fly," he said, adding that the Opposition was welcome to put up more flags.

Asked whether Umno would take more action following the expulsion of Tumpat Umno division head Datuk Kamaruddin Jaafar and several other members yesterday, Dr Mahathir, who is also the party president, said Umno would expel any member if there was basis to do so.

"We have received many reports and if we find that there is basis, we will take action," he said.

He said Kamaruddin was expelled because his actions were not in keeping with his position as a party leader.

"He asked for leave as division head which has not happened before. And he was not present during the delegates' conference. His action is not in line with that of a division head," Dr Mahathir said.

"Members must show their loyalty to the party. We take into consideration their actions."

Kamaruddin and eight others were expelled by the Umno supreme council last night for collaborating with or having joined Opposition parties. Six others were asked to show cause why disciplinary action should not be taken against them.

Asked whether such expulsions would affect BN's preparations for the election, Dr Mahathir said it would not have any effect as the number involved was very small.

He said the number that left the party this time was small compared with 1987 when many Umno leaders including those at the top level left the party to follow Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah (who set up Parti Melayu Semangat 46).

On Tengku Razaleigh's forecast that the general election would be held at the end of August or early September, he said: "It is speculation."

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