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10th elections not the toughest for me yet: PM

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DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the 10th general elections will not be his toughest yet, citing instead the general elections in 1990 as his most "challenging."

The Prime Minister said even though there is a political crisis following the sacking of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim as Deputy Prime Minister in September last year and Pas' said increasing influence, not one Umno leader with calibre from the Supreme Council had left the party unlike what had happened in the 1990 general elections.

"It (1990) was tense ... Umno lost as many as 85,000 members. We had no leaders of calibre including in the Supreme Council," he told local mass media editors at Putrajaya yesterday.

Dr Mahathir said the Barisan Nasional (BN) hopes to repeat the success of the 1995 election by securing four-fifths of the seats contested in the elections. "We got tremendous support during that election with 62 per cent of the votes.

"We hope to repeat (this performance) but I believe there will be a slight decline ... (achieved) less than in 1995 but better than 1990," he added.

He believes that polling on November 29 will proceed smoothly although the BN anticipates certain quarters will use thugs to try and create trouble before the polls.

The BN is anticipating attempts by the Opposition to disrupt the smooth conduct of the elections especially a few days before polling when Opposition candidates realise that they have a slim chance of winning. The Opposition will also hurl all sorts of accusations a few days before polling to arouse the anger of their supporters against BN.

The Government also expects the Opposition to engage gangsters to disrupt BN ceramahs and campaigns but Dr Mahathir said he is confident that the security forces will be capable of handling the situation.

"The security forces are not only prepared and in fact are capable to deal with any eventuality," he said.

Asked how real the threats of riots are, Dr Mahathir said his fear stems from the presence of an "individual" who is now with Opposition.

"Although he repeatedly talked about the rule of law, he does not respect (the rule of law).

"In 1974, he was responsible for causing riots to oppose the Government. He left the country and returned ... will do it again," he said.

Dr Mahathir, who will announce the list of Umno candidates today, said at least 30 per cent of the BN candidates will be new faces. They include former Parti Melayu Semangat 46 members who have rejoined Umno.

Among the main criteria in the selection of candidates are their capability in winning the seats to be contested and their undivided loyalty to the party.

"When we introduce new faces, incumbents may not be happy at being replaced or dropped. As such, we have to disappoint those interested in becoming candidates.

"How are we to increase the number of candidates from among the Umno Youth and Wanita Umno because the candidates from the Youth and Wanita, when they become older, refuse to step down," he said.

He was also asked whether those who are close to Anwar when he was Deputy Prime Minister have a chance to become candidates. "Umno does not

discriminate against them just because they have been close to Anwar.

"Having been close or cooperative with Datuk Seri Anwar is not a criterion in the selection of candidates.

Previously, even though they were close to Datuk Seri Anwar, they were loyal to the party.

If they have been sincere and loyal to the party, they will be selected as candidates," he said.

He also expressed confidence that the BN will win in Kedah, Terengganu and Perlis, the three states in which Pas has said that it would capture in the general elections.

"We are not denying that we are facing problems in the three states. We faced the same problems in the previous elections but the results were different from what had been predicted by analysts," he said.

Dr Mahathir said every time an election approaches, he would definitely face a problem in making a final decision on the list of candidates but this time, the burden was not as heavy as that which he had faced in the previous elections.

"In the previous elections, I made the decision alone but this time, for the list of Umno candidates, I was assisted by the party's vice presidents and the secretary-general," he added.

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