

06 JUL 1999

Mahathir-Pressure

I WILL NOT BOW TO PRESSURE, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, July 6 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today he will not bow to pressure from anyone to hold an early election.

"I'm not a fish...when given a 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 German-based Siemens' Futurelab, a state-of-the-art multimedia laboratory, at the Petronas Twin Towers, here.

Dr Mahathir said he still had a lot of time to hold the next general election.

"We don't hold election just for the sake of holding election. We have plenty of time," he said.

He said the opposition parties could keep on with their rallies until they became "tired".

He said: "We can keep them rallying until they are quite restless. We are not rallying, we are just marking time."

Dr Mahathir, who is Barisan Nasional (BN) chairman, said BN could win the "flag war" despite efforts by the opposition parties to put up flags throughout the country now.

"We'll see how many flags they can put up. We welcome them to put up more flags but we will win the flag war."

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 will study. We receive 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, however, denied that Umno was taking action to expel leaders close to former deputy prime minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

"The person must show that he is loyal to the party. We took his activities into account. For example, he asked for leave from his post as the division head and this is something we have never given. No division head had taken leave and he also did not attend the delegates conference. We also heard that his activities were not suitable for a leader or division head," he said.

Asked whether such expulsions would affect Umno in the next general 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 at the top level left Umno to follow Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah (who set up Parti Melayu Semangat 46).

"This time the number of leaders is small. The supreme council members apparently did not resign or take any action," he added.

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 like everybody else," he said.

-- BERNAMA

RV JK