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Mahathir-Election

MAHATHIR ORDERS BN TO ACTIVATE ELECTION MACHINERY

KUALA LUMPUR, June 24 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister and Barisan Nasional chairman Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today ordered component parties of the governing coalition to activate their election machineries.

"Yes, they have to prepare from now," he told reporters after chairing a two-hour BN Supreme Council meeting at the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC) here.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president, said the general election "could be called at any time".

He said the BN could not afford to "waste even one second".

Asked whether he would call for a snap election given the BN's state of readiness, Dr Mahathir said the general election could be held anytime, sooner or later.

"May be this year, may be next, may be in a month or two, may be three, four months . . .," he said.

The prime minister said good understanding prevailed among BN component parties.

He said all the component parties concurred on his advice that they set aside their differences and close ranks to face the impending general election.

"Differences between component parties or their leaders should be put in the freezer. Let freeze these differences until after the general election," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the BN would face the general election as a "strong and united party".

At today's meeting, the BN leaders exchanged views on national issues which could be used for BN's advantage in the general election such as the improving economy.

He said the leaders concurred that the BN would have to deal with problems relating to rural development.

Dr Mahathir said rural development has always been the a BN strongpoint and as such it deserved serious attention.

"We believe we can resolve a lot of problems, including those relating to education and the like so that by the time we call for the general election these problems are already settled," he said.

The meeting, the first this year, was attended by leaders or representatives of all the 14 BN component parties.

The BN is made up of peninsula-based Umno, MCA, MIC, Gerakan and the PPP, Sabah-based LDP, Akar, PDS, PBRs and SAPP and Sarawak-based PBB, SUPP, PBDS and SNAP.

Asked whether the election campaigning period would be shortened, Dr Mahathir said it would be of normal duration (less than two weeks).

"We don't have protracted campaigning because we found that prolonged campaigning could cause tension and this is unhealthy.

"We can't forget that in 1969 the campaigning ran up to six weeks and we all know that during the period disturbances and riots occurred in Kuala Lumpur," he said.

To another question, he said that the BN, after going through the list of new voters in the Election Commission's recent registration exercise, found that they were mostly BN supporters.

"So, it's not much of a problem (for the BN to win the general election)," he said.

At the outset of the press conference, Dr Mahathir jolted reporters by announcing that the BN " has decided that the general election would be held not later than June next year".

Dr Mahathir also announced the appointment of Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Osu Sukam as the state BN chairman and that Information Minister and Umno Secretary General Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob would remain as Pahang BN chairman.

Khalil was formerly Pahang Menteri Besar until his appointment to the federal Cabinet last month.

-- BERNAMA

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