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Mahathir-Umno (Election)

MAHATHIR TO LEAD MALAYSIA INTO NEW MILLENNIUM

KUALA LUMPUR, June 18 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today he will lead the country into the new millennium and expressed confidence that Barisan Nasional (BN) will retain its two-thirds majority in the coming general election.

"I have a duty to lead the party until of course the election is over," he said when asked by reporters if he will lead the country into the 21st century.

Malaysia will have to hold its general election before July next year.

"Unless you take 2001 as the next millennium, I wouldn't know. But if you take 2000 as the next millennium, I feel I have a duty unless something happens," said Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president.

To a question, Dr Mahathir said he failed to understand why his resignation or retirement should be a surprise.

"Do you really expect me to step down?. There is no reason," the prime minister said at a press conference at the close of today's session of the Umno general assembly, here.

Dr Mahathir said he would have stepped down last year "if my good (former) deputy (Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim) had behaved himself."

"But, he was interested in other more pleasurable things and therefore he missed the pleasure of becoming my successor," he said.

Asked when the general election could be held, Dr Mahathir said he could call for it at any time but was in no hurry to do that.

"I don't have to indicate the timeframe but the fact is that the term of this government ends in July next year and anytime from now till July, it is the (time)frame," he said when asked if a timeframe would be set for the polls.

Asked if Umno was prepared to face the polls, Dr Mahathir said the party was well prepared.

"The spirit is very good. We can have the election anytime but we are in no hurry," he said.

He said Umno and the other BN component parties were confident of retaining the coalition's two-thirds majority in the coming polls.

"Yes, we are very confident we can retain the two-thirds majority despite the fact that others have been always telling us that we cannot but we have done so in the past.

"We will also do the same again in the future, Insyallah, (God willing)," he said when asked about the chances of the BN retaining two-thirds majority in the coming general election.

Asked if the other BN component parties were as prepared as Umno to face the election, Dr Mahathir said: "I think so. I think they are very well prepared (and) certainly better prepared than the opposition parties."

The prime minister also said he was not going to give away any hint, including to the opposition, on when the election would be held.

"Let them (the opposition parties) work very hard until they are exhausted and then we will take our decision when the time is right," he quipped.

Asked on the various platforms opposition parties were using to woo votes, such as PAS using Islam, Dr Mahathir said they were all working together on different platforms and facing different directions.

"So, I think it is quite difficult for them to cooperate with each other because they even don't see eye-to-eye on anything," he said.

Asked on what surprise he had for the media, the prime minister said:
"The surprise is there is no surprise."
-- BERNAMA
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