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Mahathir-Opposition

MORE CRACKS IN OPPOSITION PACT, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, July 12 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Opposition alliance which is already cracking up, will face more problems in the future.

"They can't agree on so many things," he told CNBC Asia's anchor Rico Hizon when interviewed in the Asia Market Wrap programme today.

Dr Mahathir said parties in the opposition front were quarelling among themselves even before they won anything in the next general election.

He cited their disagreement over PAS' threat to take Perlis, a northern peninsular state out of the Malaysian federation if the party captures it in the next general election and if the federal government refuses to give development allocation.

PAS, the DAP, Keadilan (National Justice Party) and Parti Rakyat Malaysia (PRM) have established an opposition pact to unseat the governing Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition or at least deny the BN two-thirds majority in Parliament in the impending general election.

Dr Mahathir said he anticipated more problems for the Opposition ahead of the coming polls.

Dr Mahathir said the opposition alliance's disagreement over the PAS plot to secede Perlis from Malaysia and over PAS' aim to set up an Islamic nation exemplified the widening rifts between them.

PAS ulama Datuk Dr Harun Din recently disclosed the party's expressed intention to have Perlis secede from Malaysia.

Asked if seat allocation was the only problem confronting the opposition pact, Dr Mahathir said: "There will be more problems than that."

The prime minister said he was sure that seat allocation was one of the major problems for the opposition.

"But, there will be a lot of other problems," he said.

Asked if the opposition pact could deny the BN two-thirds majority in the coming general election, Dr Mahathir said: "They may hope so but as you know they are having problems themselves."

Asked when the general election would likely be held, Dr Mahathir, who is BN chairman and Umno president, said: "Anytime before July next year."

The last general election was held in April 1995.

When Hizon pressed further and asked the prime minister if the general election would be held this year, Dr Mahathir said: "I don't know yet. I can't give you any assurance."

Asked how much clout does the opposition have in facing the general election, Dr Mahathir said according to "other observers", the opposition have a great deal of clout.

"But, they said the same thing in 1990 and 1995 (the last two general elections) that the opposition is going to win. But they were trounced," Dr Mahathir said.

"So, may be we know something that the others don't know," he said.

Asked on the Information Ministry's decision not to give any airtime for the opposition to voice their views over government-run Radio and Television Malaysia (RTM), Dr Mahathir said the BN was not given any airtime by the foreign media "because foreign media sort of boycott us."

"They only interview people who are friendly to the opposition. So, it is not fair. On the one hand, they keep everything to themselves and on the other, they want what we have," he said.

On speculation of a nine-day campaigning period for the coming general

election, Dr Mahathir said: "We have had that before and nobody complained. We have had nine-day campaign period for the last three (general) elections."

Asked how many seats would Umno secure if the polls were held today, the prime minister brought Hizon's attention to the Sabah state election last March.

Dr Mahathir said: "When we (Umno) contested in Sabah, they told us we are going to lose. But we (Umno) won all the seats in Sabah."

"A lot of people will predict that Umno is going to lose (in the coming general election). We will wait and see who is right and who is wrong," Dr Mahathir said.

During the 30-minute interview, Dr Mahathir was also asked about his retirement plans after the general election.

"I have to retire sometime after the general election. I don't know whether sooner or later but I am always ready to retire," he said.

Asked if his deputy, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi will be his likely successor, Dr Mahathir said: "In our system, he is the most likely successor."

Asked if the sacking of some Umno members would hurt the strength of the party, Dr Mahathir said none of the party's Supreme Council members have resigned over their expulsion.

Dr Mahathir also said ground support for Umno was still very strong.

On how much was jailed former deputy prime minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim an issue in Malaysia, Dr Mahathir said it was fading.

"It is not that much of an issue now. But there are still people who are not convinced and we will work in order to convince them of the rightness of what we have decided to do," he said.

Anwar was sacked as Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister last Sept 2 and expelled from Umno a day later.

He is now serving a six year jail term at the Sungai Buloh Prison for corrupt practice.

Asked if he was ready to face Anwar's wife Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, who is also Parti Keadilan Nasional president in his Kubang Pasu parliamentary constituency in the coming polls, Dr Mahathir said Wan Azizah could contest anywhere.

Dr Mahathir said he would have no choice but to take on Wan Azizah should she decide to contest in Kubang Pasu.

On his relations with the foreign media, Dr Mahathir admitted that it was not too good.

"The Western media seems for some reason or other to dislike me and they will do anything possible to give a bad image of myself.

"On the other hand, when people from America and Europe come to Malaysia they really change their mind (have a different view about the country)," he said.

Dr Mahathir said a doctor from California whom he met yesterday told him that she was shocked to find out that the country was not as bad as what the Western media had reported.

-- BERNAMA

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