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New Budget 2000 after the polls: Dr M

THE dissolution of Parliament today means that a new federal budget for the year 2000 will have to be tabled after the general elections, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad says.

This is because the Budget 2000 tabled on October 29 by First Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin has yet to be passed by the legislature. Speaking at a press conference in Putrajaya yesterday to announce the dissolution of Parliament, Dr Mahathir said whether or not the new Budget 2000 will be the same depends on the Government which is voted into power in the general elections.

"It will be up to the new government. If we win, it will be the same...but there are those who say that someone else will become Prime Minister, so how will we know?" he said.

The budget tabled by Daim last month proposed to share the fruits of an improved economy with the people and included, among others, a 1 per cent cut in personal income tax, and a 10 per cent increase in basic salary and one-month bonus or RM1,000 for civil servants. No new or tax increases were proposed.

Dr Mahathir said the elections are being held before the fasting month to avoid the use of mosques and places of worship by political parties for campaigning purposes.

"(Otherwise) Muslims who wish to carry out their religious obligations will be disturbed by certain parties...(who) may use abusive words, profanities, or slander and cheat," he added.

Asked whether he will be contesting in his Kubang Pasu constituency, the Prime Minister said: "There is no reason for me to run away from Kubang Pasu."

The list of Barisan Nasional (BN) candidates, meanwhile, will be decided after he meets with component party leaders.

"Seat allocations will follow the existing structure. There will not be many changes. We may exchange seats between parties but in terms of number of seats allocated for each party, there will be no change," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said the BN election machinery is ready for the elections, and he is satisfied with the preparations so far. "If I am not satisfied I would not call for the elections."

Asked about the BN's chances of capturing Pas-controlled Kelantan, the Prime Minister said: "We feel we can capture Kelantan this time because Nik Aziz (Pas leader and Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Aziz Nik Mat) has torn the Pas Constitution to shreds.

"He has no use for the Pas Constitution and has offered all kinds of things to the other Opposition parties in return for their support. I think the Kelantan people will realise that Pas is not a party that can be trusted because their struggle is not based on principles or its Constitution but on getting votes," he said.

Dr Mahathir called on the people to be calm and not go overboard during the campaigning and elections.

"There is a possibility that the Opposition, because they realise they cannot win, will try and foil the general elections by having demonstrations and perhaps becoming violent. This way they can later claim that the elections were unfair or not conducted well. We already expect all these accusations from them because they know they will lose," he said.

Asked whether there will be any foreign observers, Dr Mahathir said everyone, including foreigners, are already observing what is happening in the country.

"We have the trial (of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim) that is open to everyone. There are diplomats, the foreign press, the local press, the Opposition. Even then they say the trial is not fair.

Dr Mahathir said what is important is that the Government will be fair in this election, as it has always been.

"Otherwise, as you find in some countries, the Opposition cannot win at all. But in this country, the Opposition can not only win seats but actually take over governments. That's the measure of our democracy," he added.

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