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PM: Sabah polls proof of democratic process

THE tough fight awaiting ruling party Barisan Nasional (BN) in the Sabah state election shows that Malaysia is a working democracy, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

"We are in this democratic process ... Everyone can contest in an election," he told reporters yesterday at the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah airport in Subang, Selangor, upon his arrival from Bangladesh after attending the summit meeting of the group of eight Islamic countries (D-8).

Dr Mahathir, who is also BN chairman, said the Sabah election is expected to be a tough fight for BN because of the number of candidates contesting.

He said Pas is contesting next week's Sabah state election merely to help Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) unseat Umno and BN.

"They (Pas) just want to contest to pull away the Muslim voters so that Umno will lose and the PBS win. I dare say directly that Pas is joining in the fray in Sabah just to help the PBS.

"This has been Pas' ploy ... they'll make sure Muslims lose. However, democracy practised in the country allows anyone intending to contest to do so.

"As we're in this democratic process, when there is an election, all will want to contest. Even the no-hopers join in the fray," he said.

Dr Mahathir was asked to comment on the tough fight awaiting the BN in the March 12 and 13 state election, with its candidates facing challenges in all the 48 seats and three-cornered fights being the minimum.

Pas is fielding candidates in six seats. In the last state election, none of its three candidates won.

Bername reports: Dr Mahathir is due to arrive in Kota Kinabalu today for a three-day visit to Sabah.

An Information Department statement released in Kota Kinabalu yesterday said the Prime Minister was scheduled to attend a meet-the-people session at the Dewan Masyarakat Menggatal after his arrival this evening.

He is also scheduled to meet with religious teachers and imams at the Wisma Muis in Kota Kinabalu tomorrow before performing Friday prayers with residents of Kawang at Masjid Kawang, 40km from Kota Kinabalu.

In the afternoon, he will meet the people at two sessions - one at the Dewan Datuk Salleh Sulong in Papar, and the other at Dewan Kompleks Sukan Likas in Kota Kinabalu.

Dr Mahathir will meet the people in Penampang on Saturday before leaving in the afternoon for a visit to the Federal Territory of Labuan.

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