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PM: Kelantan ruler worried over lack of progress in State

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KOTA BARU, Fri. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Sultan of Kelantan, whom he met yesterday, had expressed hope that the Federal Government would help overcome the problems and weaknesses in the State.

The Prime Minister said he felt the ruler was concerned with the lack of progress and development in the State.

"The Sultan felt Kelantan lacked the allocation and (wanted to know) what kind of assistance the Federal Government could provide to the State," he told a Press conference at the end of his visit here today.

He was asked about his audience with the Sultan where he was invited for lunch at the Istana Negeri as soon as he arrived for the visit.

Also present for the lunch were the Raja Perempuan Kelantan, Tengku Mahkota, Tengku Bendahara, Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, Second Finance Minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamed, Information Minister Tan Sri Mohd Khalil Yaacob and several State Assemblymen.

State Umno chief Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, who is a member of the Kelantan royal household, was also present.

Last night, Dr Mahathir was a guest at the Istana Kota Lama.

Dr Mahathir said he had the opportunity to discuss with the Sultan matters pertaining to State administration, proposed projects such as the proposed East Coast highway and poverty eradication programmes.

Asked whether the Sultan had made any suggestion on these matters, the Prime Minister said the Sultan felt Kelantan lacked the allocation and spoke on how the Federal Government could help.

Asked whether the audience was politically motivated, Dr Mahathir said it was not. It reflected the concern the Sultan and the Federal Government felt about Kelantan.

On his visit, Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president and Barisan Nasional chairman, said there was now greater enthusiasm among Umno and BN members and supporters and they were prepared to face the general election.

Asked whether the BN was confident of re-capturing Kelantan, lost to Pas in 1990, he said: "Unless something disastrous happens, I believe we can win... InsyAllah (God willing)."

BN now has 17 of the 43 State seats and seven of the 14 parliamentary seats in Kelantan.

Asked to justify his confidence, he said BN members were more united now and Parti Melayu Semangat 46 (headed by Tengku Razaleigh) had been dissolved (in 1996), with most ex-members joining Umno.

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