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PM: No decision yet on Harun Din's successor

Kamarul Yunus

THE Government has a list of candidates to replace Election Commission chairman Datuk Harun Din, who will retire soon, but it has yet to make any decision yet.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said there are several candidates to replace Harun, whose contract expired on June 21, after being at the helm of the commission for nine years.

"The time has come (for Harun to retire) ... we have already extended (his contract) many times as chairman," Dr Mahathir told newsmen at the KL International Airport in Sepang yesterday upon his arrival home after a six-day working visit to Japan.

Dr Mahathir was asked whether the Government has candidates to replace Harun or retain him for another term.

Harun announced in Johor Baru yesterday that he is retiring as Election Commission chairman.

"My retirement is provided for in the Constitution considering that I am now 65. It is the same for judges ...," he was quoted by Bernama as saying before making a farewell call on Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman.

Harun was appointed Election Commission chairman on October 1 1990.

On whether Harun's decision to retire will affect the smooth operation of the Election Commission, especially for the coming general election, Dr Mahathir said he does not think so as Harun "has already put everything in place".

On the coming general election, Dr Mahathir said the Government will not call a snap election if it is not prepared.

"We (the Government) are still not ready. When we are ready we will call for the election," he said, in response to suggestions that the general election is just round the corner following the Government's approval of a special payment of RM600 each for civil servants and a pay rise of between RM150 and RM200 to staff of five statutory bodies.

On the formation of a pact by the Opposition to face Barisan Nasional in the general election, Dr Mahathir said they are "not strong", despite their pledge to work together, citing that each party has its respective objectives and agenda.

"At the moment I don't think they are strong and I don't think they are going to be strong either. This is a marriage of convenience between people who have contrary views.

"One wants to set up a so-called Islamic state, the other doesn't want an Islamic state but wants a Malaysian Malaysia instead, and then Keadilan (Parti Keadilan Nasional) is for everything.

"Being everything to everybody, of course, they (Keadilan) landed up with stabbing their partners in the back by accepting everybody into their party," Dr Mahathir said.

For example, he added, Keadilan's only objective now is to obtain the release of former deputy prime minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

"There is no political agenda other than that although they (Keadilan) may say they have some interest in reformasi, justice and all that," he said.

The Prime Minister was also asked whether Malaysia will organise a second bond issue, following the successful launch of a US\$1 billion (US\$1 = RM3.80) 10-year global bond in New York last week.

"We have not decided on that," he said. In the event of a second bond issue, he added, it has not been decided whether it would be denominated in yen, euro or US dollar.

Dr Mahathir reiterated that Malaysia's move to tap the international bond market is not just to raise funds, but to establish a benchmark for the country's credit rating.

"We will see if the market is good or not (for the second bond issue). Actually, we want to establish a benchmark ... it is not that we really need the money. We have to go to the market to show what our worth is and what our rating is," he said.

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