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Mahathir-Election

SNAP ELECTION TO AVOID SACRILEGE OF FASTING MONTH, SAYS PM

PUTRAJAYA, Nov 10 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he decided to dissolve Parliament tomorrow for Malaysia to hold its 10th general election before the Ramadan so as to avoid campaigning that can be sacrilegious to the Muslim fasting month.

He said he had at first thought of calling for the general election in January next year after Hari Raya Puasa but was inspired last night to dissolve parliament tomorrow so that the election could be held before the fasting month scheduled to commence on Dec 9.

Speaking at a press conference at the Prime Minister's Department here after announcing his decision to dissolve parliament, Dr Mahathir said if the general election were to be held after Hari Raya Puasa, this meant Ramadan could be marred by undesirable activities such as slandering, spreading of lies and hurling of abuses, which are very disrespectful of the holy month.

The five-year term of the current parliament will only expire in June next year but speculation of a snap election being called anytime soon was fueled late yesterday when Dr Mahathir cancelled his scheduled trip to South Africa to attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.

Speaker Tun Mohamed Zahir Ismail announced at today's sitting of the Dewan Rakyat that he received a letter from the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah at 12.45 pm to inform him of the royal consent for the dissolution of parliament.

Earlier in the morning, Dr Mahathir had an audience with his majesty and informed the King of his decision to dissolve parliament to which the King consented.

At the press conference, which was telecast live by Radio and Television Malaysia, the prime minister said he did not wish to see the entire fasting month being subject to intentional desecration at a time when Muslims are fasting and preoccupied with performing their Ramadan and other religious obligations.

"Certain elements are also out to try to disrupt the election by staging demonstrations and riots especially when they realise they can't win," he said.

"To avoid these things from taking place, I think it is better to have the election before the fasting month. When we're fasting we want to avoid activities that border on insanity merely for the pursuit of political support from Muslims at the expense of misinterpreting Islam," he said.

Replying to a question, Dr Mahathir said: "I don't go for election to test my popularity against somebody. Election is a serious business and we go for election to determine who's going to form the government."

"I don't care whether I'm popular or not. What is important is that this country gets a good government," said the prime minister who is upbeat that the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition would be returned to power with a strong majority.

"I don't seek anything for myself. I seek something for this country and I don't care if I go down in history as a bad or good guy.

"What is important is what is achieved for this country by the Barisan Nasional government," he added.

-- BERNAMA

AU RYN