

# Sarawak state election may be held next month: PM

3 11 AUG 2001

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**By DZULKARNAIN TAIB**

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday said the Sarawak state election is likely to be held next month.

Dr Mahathir said Sarawak Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud had indicated to him during a meeting on Tuesday that the state election may be held in September this year.

"He hinted that the election will be held in September but the date has not been fixed yet," he told reporters at Putrajaya.

It was reported that the meeting with the Prime Minister was held at the request of Abdul Taib who is the Sarawak Barisan Nasional (BN) chairman.

The state election, last held in 1996 in which BN won 58 of the 62 seats must now be held before November 10 this year, the expiry date of the 62-member State Legislative Assembly.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir attended a pre-Merdeka celebration with some 2,000 representatives from 129 Chinese organisations at Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Putrajaya 1 at Precinct 8.

In his speech, the Prime Minister called on Malaysians of all races to safeguard and maintain the racial harmony that has contributed much towards the stability and prosperity of the country.

"It is important for us to preserve harmony because we derive much benefit from it. In Malaysia, we work together for the benefit of the country," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said Ma-

laysia is fortunate to be able to immediately overcome the racial riot in 1969 unlike other countries in Europe and West Asia that faced similar conflicts.

"In those countries, the racial problems continued for decades, while in Malaysia, we were able to work together to develop the country in a short period of time," he said.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir re-

ceived Merdeka Day greeting cards from 19 groups representing school children, government servants, non-governmental and political organisations and corporate bodies.

The cards of various sizes and shapes were presented to Dr Mahathir at a ceremony at Dataran Perdana, Prime Minister's Department, in Putrajaya.

Among them were Telekom Malaysia Bhd, Persatuan Bekas Tentera Malaysia, Lim Kok Wing Institute of Creative Technology, Persatuan Silambam Malaysia Wilayah Persekutuan and Pusat Komuniti Orang-Orang Pekak.

Dr Mahathir also gave away prizes of RM5,000 each to two winners of the NST/Coca-Cola "Dear Mr Prime Minister" letter-writing con-

test held in conjunction with Merdeka Day.

They were from three student Johann Ghazaly of SMK St. John and fourth former Pong Yu Ming of SMK Taman Desa.

The contest, held over three weeks from August 1 to 21, was jointly organised by the NST Youthquake and Coca-Cola Far East Ltd..