

PM: Sarawak ready to go to the polls

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and Joseph Bingkasan

KUCHING, Sat. -- Sarawak is ready to go to the polls any time as the State Barisan Nasional leaders are prepared, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"Any time is the right time," he told a Press conference at the Kuching International Airport before returning to Kuala Lumpur.

He was asked whether now was the right time to hold the State election and also to give an assessment of his two-day visit to the State.

Dr Mahathir said he had met the BN leaders privately and found them to be ready as "they understand the problems and the attitude".

He said while the BN leaders were ready to hold an election, it did not mean that an election should be held "for the fun of it".

☐ PLEASE TURN TOPAGE 2, COL 3

Umno not planning entry into Sarawak

☐ FROM PAGE ONE

Holding an election, he added, was a serious matter and was only done to form a new Government. Asked to comment on certain quarters claiming to be representing Umno in Sarawak, given that Umno had many times said that the party would not be making an entry in the State, Dr Mahathir said: "I would like to tell the people of Sarawak that Umno is not here.

Dr Mahathir said the people of Sarawak must not be misled by people claiming to be representing Umno or are in the State with the blessings of the party leadership.

He was also asked to comment on the role of Parti Pesaka Bumiputra Bersatu (PBB)'s former deputy president Datuk Abang Abu Bakar Mustapha, who has said that he would be challenging PBB president and Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud in Samarahan. (Abang Abu Bakar has been linked with efforts to bring Umno into the State.)

To this, Dr Mahathir said: "He can challenge ... but he is not Umno."

Asked whether Umno will be taking action against people who claim to be representing Umno, he said the party had al-

ready disclaimed them.

He was also asked to comment on the Opposition's exploitation of the drop in price of palm oil which had affected Felda settlers.

Dr Mahathir said he would like to see the opposition "buy the commodity at RM2,400 per tonne and selling them at RM800" to outsiders.

"If they are so clever, they should come out with an alternative now and not claim they can do so when they become the Government."