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Dr M: Sarawak election likely to be held next month

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PUTRAJAYA, Wed. - The Sarawak election is likely to be held next month, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

However, no date had been fixed, he said.

Dr Mahathir said Sarawak Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud, whom he met at the Prime Minister's Department yesterday, indicated to him that the State election would be held next month.

"Only the date has not been fixed yet," he said when approached by reporters after addressing a gathering of some 2,000 members of various Chinese associations and guilds at SMK Putrajaya here.

The current term of the Sarawak State Legislature ends on Nov 18 but political analysts believed it would be dissolved much earlier to pave the way for the polls.

The Election Commission will meet to fix the nomination and polling dates. The election has to be held within 60 days after the dissolution.

In the 1996 State election, the BN won 58 of the 62 seats, including 18 unopposed.

Taib met Dr Mahathir for an hour yesterday where he was believed to have sought views and advice from the Prime Minister, who is BN chairman, on the lists of candidates submitted by the various component parties of the State BN.

The meeting was held at the request of Taib as Sarawak BN chairman.

Prior to this, Taib, 65, had said that he would meet Dr Mahathir upon the Prime Minister's return from his visits to Yemen and Uganda to submit the list of BN candidates for the State election which must be held before Nov 10.

The Chief Minister will not be defending his Asajaya seat but will contest in Balingian instead.

Agriculture Minister Datuk Effendi Norwawi will also not defend his Dalat seat.

The decision on Taib was made by a committee comprising Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu (PBB) MPs and State Assemblymen which convened a meeting at party headquarters on Aug 21 specifically to discuss where he should stand.