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PM: No snap election (HL)

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PUTRAJAYA, Sun. - The Barisan Nasional Government will not call for a snap general election simply because it is in a good position to win, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

Chiding the Opposition for its predictions that snap elections will be called soon, Dr Mahathir said the Government viewed the calling of elections as a serious matter.

"I cannot understand the Opposition ... on one hand they say that this country is in a rotten state and the economy is not doing well.

"If the economy is not doing well, why should the Government call for an early election?

"So is the Opposition then admitting that the situation in the country is very good?" he said when responding to questions by reporters during a break at his Hari Raya open house in Seri Perdana.

He was asked about predictions by the Opposition that the Government would call for elections soon.

Of late, such predictions have been rife with several Opposition leaders including DAP chairman Lim Kit Siang and Keadilan election bureau head Saifuddin Nasution Ismail saying that snap elections could be called soon.

The Prime Minister said the Opposition seemed to have a fixation with the elections.

"They (the Opposition) think that the election is a play thing.

"We take elections very seriously and don't just call for an election because we are in a position to win," he said, citing the example of the 1999 General Election.

Dr Mahathir said despite that year being one filled with problems for the Barisan Nasional Government, it still called for an election.

When asked if the Government would call for elections next year, Dr Mahathir said he did not know. "It all depends...", he said but did not elaborate.

When asked about Malaysia's economic performance, Dr Mahathir said he expected growth to be between 0.5 and one per cent for this year.

"Maybe one per cent, of course it's very difficult ... maybe half-a-per cent for this year. Next year will be better," said Dr Mahathir, who is also Finance Minister.

He said the country's economy was already showing signs of recovery from the initial shock of the Sept 11 terrorist attacks on the United States and people were now beginning to travel again.

On a videotape of Osama bin Laden released in the US in which he was apparently recounting plans for the Sept 11 attacks, the Prime Minister said he did not want to pass judgement as he had not watched it.

He said he would leave it to the people to judge what they saw.