

Shiver in fear, PM tells foes

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SHAH ALAM: Opposition parties should "shiver in fear" of a humiliating defeat in the next general election, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

Declaring that "the time will come very soon", the Prime Minister and Umno president said Barisan Nasional would prove that support for the coalition had not eroded as the Opposition had hoped for, but had grown stronger.

He said the Opposition had claimed that Umno was weak and on the verge of collapse even after it won the 1999 general election with three-quarters majority.

"But by the show of support we have today, just you wait and see. The person and issues that you exploited are no longer issues for the people," he said when launching Umno's 56th anniversary celebrations at Stadium Malawati yesterday.

Later at a press conference, when asked whether the general election would be held anytime now, he replied in jest: "You come to me personally and I will tell you."

In his speech, he said the Opposition had undermined the development the Government brought to the country by saying that any ruling party could do the same.

"It is not easy to develop a country. But they (the Opposition) said that if they are the government, they can also do it. This is shallow talk from a frog under the coconut shell," he said.

Dr Mahathir said outsiders often criticised Malaysia as being undemocratic.

"But we are not bothered," he said, adding that Malaysia had held 10 general elections after 44 years of independence.

He said the Barisan was not a ruling party that would go to the streets to resolve problems.

"We seek solutions to problems at the negotiating table," he said.

He said not all governments could develop their countries, adding that only efficient leadership could overcome problems and grow in strength.

He said the Barisan-led government had these qualities, resulting in Malaysia developing successfully af-

ter independence.

"We do not deny that we also have problems but we are able to overcome them and ease the situation including during the 1969 racial riots when the world thought it would be the end of Malaysia but we proved them wrong," he said.

Dr Mahathir also reminded Umno members that it was through Umno that Malaysia had gained independence after the party succeeded in uniting Malays, who at the time were

very parochial.

At the press conference, he said if there were no other parties which attempted to erode the support towards Umno, the Malays today would be as united as those in 1945-46, when the only other party was the Malaysian Nationalist Party which could not garner support, as Umno had completely united the Malays.

He also said if it was not for Umno, Malaysia might have even ended up like Singapore where Singaporeans had become the minority in their own land, with the influx of foreigners.

"It is not that we do not allow foreigners to come in but we cannot afford to accept too many of them because then we will become the minority," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said Malaysia was condemned for doing things its own way during the Asian financial crisis including not accepting the advice of the International Monetary Fund and choosing to impose currency controls.

"But one by one, they fell. The IMF chief was prematurely replaced and (currency trader) George Soros suffered huge losses.

"Serves him right. Now he has written a book praising Malaysia's way as the right way.

"How they used to call us stupid. Now look who is stupid."