

14/09/2002

PM won't contest next polls (HL)

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ALOR STAR, Fri. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will not contest the next general election.

Dr Mahathir, who will hand over the country's leadership to his deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in October next year, said today it was his desire to retire completely.

"That is what I want ... unless of course I'm forced to. My role in the next general election will be to campaign very hard... when I don't have a job I will be able to move around," he said.

Dr Mahathir has been Member of Parliament for Kubang Pasu since 1974.

He said he had not conveyed his decision to the Umno supreme council, "but I think they ought to know I have to step down some time. I can't be here forever".

Dr Mahathir said this at a Press conference at the Asian Composites Manufacturing Sdn Bhd plant at Bukit Kayu Hitam.

He was asked to elaborate on his speech at a meet-the-people session at Sultan Abdul Hamid College earlier in the morning.

In his speech, Dr Mahathir had expressed his intention of not contesting in the next general election.

However, he said it was his responsibility to correct all the wrongs and make sure people were not taken in by Opposition lies.

Asked if his intention would weaken Kedah Umno, Dr Mahathir said: "No... (Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Syed Razak Syed Zain) is the one holding Kedah Umno together.

"I think Kedah Umno can still win," he said. "You can see by the support this morning."

Disagreeing that Pas was getting stronger in Kedah, Dr Mahathir said the Opposition party only won the recent by-election in Anak Bukit by bringing in outsiders to vote in the constituency.

"Most people support Umno but Pas shifted people from Sabah to Anak Bukit and that is why it won... we did not realise how extensive it was until we started checking. We found that about 2,000 voters were transferred to Anak Bukit."

About 5,000 people attended the morning session where Dr Mahathir spent about an hour explaining how Pas had misused Islam and manipulated the electoral system for its own gains.

Dr Mahathir said people should realise the importance of the electoral process and make sure they made the right choice when voting.

He added that a wrong decision would only come back to haunt the people later.

Dr Mahathir said he was saddened by what happened at the Anak Bukit by-election.

He said Pas had imported voters from other constituencies to gain victory, and this had happened since former Pas president Datuk Fadzil Noor contested there.

"Pas has planned to gain control of Kedah and it is willing to do this even by using illegitimate means. That is why I consider its victory in Anak Bukit an illegitimate victory... we lost in Anak Bukit because of the tactics that Pas used.

"It may not be wrong in terms of the rules, but it is wrong from the religious point of view," he said.

The function at Sultan Abdul Hamid College, where Dr Mahathir's father

Mohamad Iskandar was the first headmaster, was a homecoming of sorts for the Prime Minister, as it was also his alma mater.

After his speech, Dr Mahathir and Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali toured the college and had lunch at the canteen.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir said people should be thankful they were able to live in a peaceful country, unlike certain other countries where even the leaders could not move about freely.

He also said the Government had never misused the Internal Security Act to suppress people's freedom or jail political enemies.