

PM: Polls after I go

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Dr M cools early election fever

KUALA LUMPUR: There won't be a general election at least until October.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday shot down speculation that he would call a general election before he steps down in October.

Mahathir, who announced his intention to step down last June before being persuaded to stay on for a smooth handover of power, said the election date would be decided by his successor, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

"No there won't be," he told *Reuters* in an interview, when pressed if there was a chance of an election before he goes.

The news agency said there has been talk among opposition politicians and Umno members that Mahathir might opt to lead one last campaign to hand Abdullah a safe victory.

The government does not need to call an election until November next year.

Many political observers believe that Mahathir will call an early election to ensure that Barisan Nasional gets a two-third majority, as it did in the 1999 general election, before he hands over his position to Abdullah.

In the last general election, BN won 133

parliamentary seats of 193 it contested.

However, at state level, BN lost control of Terengganu to PAS, which also retained control of Kelantan.

The election fever in the country has picked up since Mahathir announced his intention to step down.

Political parties both in the government and the opposition have started their groundwork, and some have even set up operation centres.

Some BN component parties are on a nationwide trip to recruit new members and are getting them to register as voters.

Most parties are hoping for more parliamentary and state seats under their constituencies when the Election Commission finalises the delineation exercise.

While some political pundits say the coming election will be the most crucial ever, several Umno leaders have offered not to seek re-election.

The BN is taking a "no-turning back" stance to win Kelantan and Terengganu while PAS is said to be strengthening its presence in Pahang, Perlis and Kedah.