

Abdullah will decide election date

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KOTA KINABALU, Fri. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said that his successor Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi will decide when to hold the Sabah State elections.

Speaking at a Press conference at the Kota Kinabalu International Airport before departing for Kuala Lumpur after a day-long visit here, he said he would not know how soon the elections would be held.

Dr Mahathir, who is Barisan Nasional chairman, was asked if it was ideal to have the elections now as unity in the State BN was at its strongest.

"I think, so but I do not know how soon, I would leave it to my successor (to decide)."

Dr Mahathir had said that he would step down as Prime Minister and Umno president in October.

Asked if his statement would mean that there would be no State elections before his retirement in October, Dr Mahathir repeated that the matter was up to his successor to decide.

On whether he would like to see the State elections being held before he retires, he said it was not a question of his liking.

When suggested that a resounding BN victory in the State elections would be a retirement present, Dr Mahathir said he would be thankful for such a present even after he retired.

The State elections is only due next

March, but there have been speculation that it may be called soon.

Asked on the utilisation of Federal allocations for Sabah, Dr Mahathir said like in the peninsula, some were not fully used because of planning and budgeting problems.

He said in some cases, the non-utilisation of allocations were due to problems related to land, compensation and squatters.

He commended Chief Minister Datuk Musa Aman for taking time to see for himself the implementation of government projects in the State.

Earlier at the opening of the United Pasok Momogun Kadazandusun Organisation (Upko) ninth congress at the Sabah Cultural Centre in Dongonggon here, Dr Mahathir said the ability of people from different races, religions and cultures to

go-operate through the BN has made it possible for Malaysians to live in peace and harmony.

"We are peaceful due to the BN concept through which people of different races and religions help one another," he said.

Also present were Chief Minister Datuk Musa Aman, Upko president Tan Sri Bernard Dompok and leaders of other Barisan Nasional component parties.

Dr Mahathir said the people should continue to assist one another, including in politics, to ensure that the Government formed after an election was a strong one.

The Prime Minister said he was confident that the BN, a coalition of 14 political parties, would be able to co-operate once candidates for the next election were identified.