

20 SEP 2003

Mahathir-Relieved

DR MAHATHIR FEELS RELIEVED, LEAVING THE BN TO ABDULLAH

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 20 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today expressed relief knowing the strength of the Barisan Nasional (BN) before handing over power to his successor Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Dr Mahathir, who is also BN chairman, said he would not hesitate to hand over power to Abdullah in view of the cooperation shown by the BN component parties.

"I am glad none have given negative views. All have been supportive of Pak Lah. So, I leave with a sense of relief," he told reporters after officiating the 50th anniversary celebrations of the BN at the Merdeka Stadium here today.

He was asked to comment on the situation in BN after he steps down as the Prime Minister next month.

Asked on Abdullah's capability to lead the BN to face the next general election, Dr Mahathir said his successor had proven that the BN could achieve victory even without his direct support.

Dr Mahathir said: "I think Pak Lah can...even in the past, Pak Lah played a major role in the election. In fact, I didn't have to go to the ground. I left it to Pak Lah. So no problem lah."

He said he was confident that the BN could retain its two-third majority in the next election.

"I will campaign though not as a candidate. I will campaign because I do not forget. Many people had campaigned for me that I was able to become a Prime Minister.

"Now, it is my turn to repay them," he said.

On the BN's chances of recapturing Kelantan and Terengganu from PAS, Dr Mahathir said the BN now was in a better position than before.

"I see that we have a better chance now than in the past," he said.

Dr Mahathir also did not rule out the possibility of spending more time in Kelantan and Terengganu to strengthen the BN's return to power in the two states.

Asked whether BN component parties in Sabah and Sarawak would be asked to combine to form a bigger party, he said it was up to these parties.

"It is up to them, if they choose to merge, we have no problem. If they don't want because of different views and races, we leave it to them. We will not force.

"In Malaysia, we don't force anyone to accept anything. We want to free the communities to do it their ways, all parties to do it their ways as long as they subscribe to the BN principles that of power sharing," he said.

-- BERNAMA

MUN RBZ HK ABG