

PM: Precedent exists for GE during haj

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By Nigel Aw

Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak today brushed aside calls by PAS to ensure that the general election would not be called during the haj period, pointing out that this has been done before in the past.

"We have done the general election during the haj season before, that was during the time of a former prime minister. If I'm not mistaken, it was in 1986.

I still remembered at that time one of my committee member was supposed to be a candidate for the election but I could not contact him because he was in Mecca (for his haj).

"When he returned (to Malaysia) he accepted the fact that he could not contest (because of this). If he had contested he would have won for sure," he told a press conference after chairing the Umno supreme council meeting this evening.

Najib was responding to PAS deputy president Mohamad Sabu's statement that he would be committing a sin if he did not ensure that the general election is not held during the pilgrimage season.

At this, the premier shot back at Mohamad, stating: "Is he greater than God to decide on sin and rewards?"

He said that there were no restrictions to performing the haj and if one has committed to it then it should be carried out over other matters including the general election.

"I am not bound by any demands from PAS or any other leaders," he added.

Umno had launched a broadside against PAS for calling on its party activists to put off their haj in anticipation of a general election being called in September.

PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang however, had defended the decision, pointing out that politics is an integral part of Islam.

Responding to Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Nazri Abdul Aziz's statement that elections would be better called after a full five-year term, Najib insisted that this is the prerogative of the government.

"This is the provision of the constitution, so long as it is unchanged it is not necessary to be held at a fixed time, and the prerogative (by the government) is allowed by the constitution," he said.

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