

DR M UPBEAT PAKATAN CAN STILL WIN

Pakatan will still win if elections called in near future, says PM

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TUN Dr Mahathir Mohamad is confident that Pakatan Harapan would still return as the ruling coalition if the general election is called in the near future.

The prime minister, who is also PH chairman, said his conclusion was drawn after comparing leaders in the coalition with those in the opposition parties.

"The coalition is confident that if we were to stand in the election today, we will win.

"I think no one wants to see the return of (former prime minister and Pekan member of parliament) Datuk Seri Najib (Razak).

"Everyone knows that Datuk Seri Najib 'saok' (stole) a lot of money (when Barisan Nasional was in power) which is unlike the leaders of the present administration," he said after chairing the PH Presidential Council meeting here yesterday.

Present were PKR president Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng and Parti Amanah Negara president Mohamad Sabu.

Dr Mahathir reiterated that he would keep to his promise that he would eventually pass the mantle of leadership to Anwar.

He recalled the moment when



Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad speaking after chairing the PH Presidential Council meeting in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. With him are Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, PKR president Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and party heads. PIC BY AIZUDDIN SAAD

he stepped down as the country's fourth prime minister on Oct 31, 2003.

"When I announced my intention of stepping down (as the country's fourth prime minister), there were opposition leaders, who are now my friends (in PH), who had cast doubts over my intention.

"I proved them wrong and I did step down as the prime minister at the time," he said.

He declared that PH will not curb freedom of speech, as promised in its election manifesto.

"Do I have to assure you? We have already espoused in freedom of the press in our election

manifesto and on numerous occasions.

"(And now) You are asking me to say it again?"

Dr Mahathir said the presidential Council meeting had, among others, deliberated on the actions of irresponsible "extremist" quarters who were fanning the flames of racial and religious issues.

"These extremists are not thankful that people in the country live in peace and harmony.

"Malaysia is unlike other countries, where tension exists among the people as a result of irresponsible quarters playing up sensitive issues.

"If we allow ourselves to be influenced by extremists and such

issues keep being sensationalised, it will sow disunity among the people," he said.

He also took aim at the Umno-Pas charter, which he said was unhealthy for a country as racially and religiously diverse as Malaysia.

The charter, he said, would play the race card, which would be detrimental to the country.

"They seek to play up racial and religious issues. This is unhealthy for a country that is multiracial like ours. It stirs up enmity, which has happened in other countries.

"We should be discussing or debating each other on policies, not stir up race relations and fan eth-

nic and religious emotions."

Dr Mahathir also urged the media to be responsible in their reporting and to refrain from sensationalising issues related to race and religion.

He said the government would intensify engagement efforts with the mainstream and alternative media in its bid to assure the people that Malaysia was still a peaceful multiracial and multi-religious nation.

He also chided quarters who were promoting campaigns to boycott products and services of certain races in Malaysia.

"Boycotting is not an effective 'weapon'. In fact, it will only trigger anger among the people."