

PM: Election possible during Haj season
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KUALA LUMPUR: The upcoming Haj season is no hindrance to holding the country's 13th general election, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said Friday.

Asked whether he would take into consideration the Haj season in deciding when to seek dissolution of Parliament as demanded recently by PAS leaders, including deputy president Mohamad Sabu, Najib said: "No, how can I be tied to any demands from PAS or any leader. In our history we have conducted general elections during the haj season," said Najib, adding that this was done in 1986.

The 1986 general election was on August 3, 13 days before Aidiladha.

Najib related the example of a member of his Umno division committee, who was nominated as a candidate for the general election that year.

"I could not communicate this to him because he was in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. When he got back (from the Haj), he accepted the fact that he could not be an elected representative, even though he would have won had he contested," said Najib.

Najib said the Government would not obstruct anyone from performing the Muslim religious obligation.

"We do not obstruct anyone from performing the haj, and that must be given the priority and not any other affair, including elections. If we have decided to perform the Haj, then we are religiously mandated to go ahead," he said.

The timing of this year's Haj season, which starts shortly before Najib is scheduled to table the 2013 Budget on Sept 28, has raised speculation that elections, if called soon after the budget, could fall within the pilgrimage season.

Lembaga Tabung Haji, in a recent statement responding to questions from The Star, said the first batch of this year's estimated 27,900 Haj pilgrims will begin departing for Saudi Arabia on Sept 17.

The peak of the Haj season will be during Hari Raya Aidiladha, which is expected to fall on Oct 26 and the last group of Malaysian pilgrims will return to Malaysia on Nov 29.

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