

Dr M: GE13 will be about race
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By Shannon Teoh

KUALA LUMPUR, June 28 — The general election to be held within a year will centre on race as Malaysia has become more racist than ever, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The influential former prime minister told a forum on business and politics that Barisan Nasional's (BN) weakness, after losing its customary two-thirds majority in Parliament in the March 2008 election, has forced the coalition to cater to various racial demands.

Dr Mahathir says the country has become racist more than ever. — File pic

"In this country, we are very racist, even more than before. The next election is going to be about race. Who gives what, who gets what based on race. When the government is weak, it caters to demands which are not going to be good for the country in the long run," he said.

Dr Mahathir, who led the country for 22 years before retiring in 2003, later told reporters "the current government is inherited from the previous administration which didn't do so well. As a result, we have a weak government.

"The old leader was replaced with a new leader who is trying hard but it is not easy. He is being pressure from all sides. If he concedes to one group, other groups are unhappy. In the end the minority prevails," he said.

Datuk Seri Najib Razak took power in April 2009, a year after Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi led the ruling BN to its worst-ever electoral performance, ceding 82 federal seats and five state governments.

In March, Abdullah, who was handpicked by Dr Mahathir to succeed him, also said race will be the main issue for the 13th general election.

"We are always concerned about race. Because there is a tendency for certain parties to make use of these issues, as a way of getting support for them and creating problems for us," the Kepala Batas MP said in a video interview with Bloomberg.

However, he told the business wire "the lesson we can learn is, and some people may not agree, but the fact we didn't have two-thirds did not mean that we became weak."

Najib took over from Abdullah ostensibly to improve on BN's performance in the next general election.

Observers believe he requires an improvement on the 140 federal seats won and to regain some of the states lost to be assured of remaining in power.

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