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MENTAKAB, JULY 14 (BERNAMA) -- DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD SAID TODAY THE ABILITY OF THE BARISAN NASIONAL TO RESOLVE DIFFERENCES OF OPINION AMONG ITS COMPONENT MEMBERS THROUGH TALKS REFLECTED THE COUNTRY'S STRENGTH AND UNIQUENESS THAT SHOULD BE PROTECTED AND PRESERVED.

THE PRIME MINISTER SAID THE MULTIRACIAL CHARACTER OF MALAYSIA CONTRIBUTED TO THIS STRENGTH, ADDING THAT MANY OTHER PLURAL SOCIETIES HAD BEEN WRACKED BY CIVIL WAR OVER DIFFERENCES OF OPINION.

+MALAYSIANS OUGHT TO BE THANKFUL THAT WE ARE ABLE TO LIVE IN PEACE AND HARMONY,+ HE TOLD A GATHERING OF 5,000 PEOPLE COMPRISING UMNO AND OTHER BN COMPONENT PARTY MEMBERS AT THE OPENING OF THE MENTAKAB UMNO DIVISIONAL DELEGATES' MEETING HERE.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID THE MAY 13 INCIDENT WAS AN EXCEPTION RATHER THAN THE NORM, AND ADDED THAT ALTHOUGH +SOMETIMES PROBLEMS CROP UP, WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO SETTLE THEM THROUGH DISCUSSIONS.+ -- MORE

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HE SAID IF THERE WERE ANY WHO REFUSED TO ACCEPT THE WAY OF LIFE IN THIS COUNTRY, THEY CONSTITUTED ONLY A SMALL GROUP AND HAD GONE INTO THE JUNGLE TO OPPOSE THE BN GOVERNMENT.

+THIS STRENGTH AND UNIQUENESS THAT WE ENJOY MUST BE PRESERVED SO THAT THE TIES AMONG US ALL WILL BE FURTHER ENHANCED,+ HE SAID.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR, WHO IS UMNO PRESIDENT, COMMENDED THE PAHANG UMNO LIAISON COMMITTEE AND THE MENTAKAB UMNO DIVISION FOR INVITING THE LEADERS OF THE OTHER BN COMPONENT PARTIES TO THE OPENING OF THE DELEGATES' MEETING.

SUCH A PRACTICE, HE SAID, SHOULD BE EMULATED BY OTHER UMNO DIVISIONS SO THAT ITS BN PARTNERS COULD SEE HOW UMNO WAS RUN AND TO FORGE CLOSER TIES.

HE ALSO SAID THE PRACTICE OF HAVING AS SMALL A NUMBER OF PEOPLE REPRESENTED BY AN ELECTED REPRESENTATIVE BENEFITED MALAYSIANS GREATLY, UNLIKE SOME OTHER COUNTRIES WHERE AN ELECTED REPRESENTATIVE MIGHT BE REPRESENTING UP TO A MILLION CONSTITUENTS. -- MORE

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HE SAID THAT IN PAHANG THERE WERE 10 PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES BUT ADDED THAT HE WAS SURE PEOPLE WOULD WANT TO HAVE THE NUMBER INCREASED.

HOWEVER, HE SAID, THE NUMBER WOULD DEFINITELY BE INCREASED WHEN MALAYSIA HAD ATTAINED ITS OBJECTIVE OF HAVING A POPULATION OF 70 MILLION.

+IT IS UP TO YOU TO INCREASE THE POPULATION,+ HE SAID, TO THE LAUGHTER OF THE GUESTS. -- BERNAMA

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