

'Let us unite'

By HARDEV KAUR

MULTIRACIAL Malaysia needs a strong government to move ahead and to guarantee stability. A weak government will only be playing the politics of survival, it will constantly need to play to the gallery rather than to do what needs to be done.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad stressed: "A weak government will not bring us out of the present recession."

In an open letter to all Malaysians, contained in the Barisan Nasional (BN) manifesto unveiled in Kuala Lumpur yesterday, he called on Malaysians to support the coalition.

"Let us gather our strengths in this hour of trial. Let us not experiment with untested ideas. Let us unite for a better future," Dr Mahathir, who is also BN chairman, added.

He admitted that like all developing countries Malaysia is faced with a "serious recession." It is going through a difficult period, but is not so badly off as others.

Malaysians, he said, had become used to such high rates of economic growth that the slowdown worries us. "We look for a scapegoat and it is easy to

blame the Government."

The only way the country can ride through the recession is to face it calmly, to plan moves carefully and utilise intrinsic strengths. "If we give in to emotions, if we chose the easy way out and wildly accuse each other, we will only compound the damage," he stressed.

He said the fall in commodity prices is not of the country's own making; slack demand, substitute materials and market manipulations by rich countries have depressed all primary commodities prices. Against the powerful North, the developing countries can do very little.

"Money is not so easy to make now. So houses, cars and goods are not so readily saleable. Government revenues have shrunk. This is the reality today. Malaysians have to face this reality," Dr Mahathir said in his letter.

It is especially when the going gets tough that the country needs a steady, experienced and firm hand to deal with the problems. It needs a strong government, he stressed, adding that already the Government's corrective measures are showing results.

External borrowings have been reduced from \$4.6 billion in

1982 to \$800 million in 1985. Government expenditure had been reduced from \$27,110 million in 1982 to \$24,859 million last year.

Imports have been reduced, the balance of payments have become increasingly favourable to Malaysia, reserves remain high and jobs are being created. Civil service performance has improved and civil servants now understand the private sector better.

"The Government will continue to be guided by the principles of Bersih, Cekap and Amanah (clean, efficient and trustworthy) and will also continue with efforts to create a modern, disciplined and moral society," he added.

The Government has a sound record and the peace and stability of Malaysia is envied by many other countries, Dr Mahathir said.

Health, medical and educational services have improved, the prices of essentials reduced, cheap houses built, rural development progressing, and the industrial base broadened and strengthened. As a result, Malaysians enjoy a high standard of living, he said.

The agriculture sector, where the poor are concentrated, con-

tinue to receive special attention and "indeed, the poor have always been helped. The rich are helped only where their economic activities will create jobs and generate faster growth."

Malaysians, Dr Mahathir said, have every reason to be optimistic about the future. The country will not be totally dependent on commodities and will manufacture for export. In 1984 manufactures earned \$12,201 million or 32 per cent of total export earnings.

On arguments that the Government is too strong and that it should be deprived of a two-third majority, Dr Mahathir asked the opponents whether they would want a weak government if it were they who were ruling.

Malaysia needs a strong and stable government, otherwise politicians will try to outmanoeuvre each other and the country suffers. Dr Mahathir said: "Look at the countries with weak governments. Have they prospered? Isn't there civil strife, instability, even chaos and civil war? Even developed countries fail when the govern-

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Unite for better future: Dr M

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ments are weak. Our children deserve a better future."

Dr Mahathir said the Government had been very liberal and that the opposition can hurl numerous baseless accusations against it goes to show that the Government is not "oppressive."

Reports and comments in the media are freer now than at any other time in the country's history, he said. Often, these are without foundation and sought to sow confusion and doubt. "This is the price of democracy.

The Government's only weapon is truth and positive action," he added.

Although faced with problems, however threatening, the BN did not resort to extremism. He said: "The BN decides by consultation, abhors emotions, draws up and implements concrete beneficial plans, listens to the people and balances the demands of the different races, regions and states, rich and poor, and the urban and rural."

The BN's basic philosophies are sound, Dr Mahathir said, ad-

ding "it believes in results, not rhetoric." While admitting that the coalition had not achieved complete success, he said it was because like all nations and governments, it could not see all eventualities, did not have unlimited resources and had not perfected its implementation techniques.

However, he gave an assurance that the Government will take corrective measures wherever needed as it is a responsive Government.

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