

PM: IT'S NOT A GIMMICK

BN's fight for the people dates back to 1951, he says

26 JUL 1986

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri.— The Barisan Nasional's championing of the people is not an election gimmick but a tradition which dates back to 1951, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"And when we say we will champion the people, we do not just mean it for this election but for a lifetime," he said.

That was why, he said, the Barisan should be returned to power with a more than two-thirds majority.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Barisan chairman, was speaking at the launching of the coalition's manifesto at the Umno headquarters.

He said the Barisan's slogan of *Tradisi Membela Rakyat* did not refer to one community but all communities "for ours is the only coalition that consists of all the races in the country."

"There are many who try to copy our kind of coalition but even then, it is only confined to certain parties and only in the peninsula," he added in apparent reference to the electoral pact among five parties — PAS, SDP, PSRM, NasMa and the Workers Party.

He said that PAS and DAP were also having an electoral understanding but would not admit it. "This does not happen in Barisan."

The manifesto contained an open letter from Dr Mahathir to *My Fellow Malaysians*.

The manifesto, in the colours of the Malaysian flag, depicts the Prime Minister on the cover

and a row of smiling Malaysians standing with their arms linked.

It also depicts a dacing and the words *Keep Your Future Safe, Make the Wise Choice*. The launching was telecast live over RTM.

On the Opposition's slogan of denying the Barisan a two-thirds majority because the present government was too strong, Dr Mahathir said: "We have ruled with a two-thirds majority since Independence. Where in the developing world are there cases of countries which have done better than us?"

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

"A weak government will not bring us out of the present recession," he said.

He said a strong government could effect changes and the results were showing — government expenditures had been cut from \$27.110 million in 1982 to \$24.859 million last year.

"If Malaysia is so bad, why do so many people take risks to smuggle themselves into the country?"

Dr Mahathir also criticised the DAP for challenging the independence of the Election Commission: "Even if there may be some basis, the party was only denying the democratic right of the people by trying to stop the election."

On criticisms that the Government had been oppressive, he said the accusations were all baseless: "There are more freer reports and comments

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in our newspapers and magazines, more than at any time in the history of Malaysia.

"Such allegations affect not just the country's image but the economy as well.

"But we are willing to be patient. This is the price of democracy."

He added that the Government's only weapon to

this was "truth and positive action."

Present at the launching were leaders of the component parties, including Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Joseph Pairin Kitingan and Sarawak Chief Minister Datuk Patinggi Haji Abdul Taib Mahmud.

Later at a gathering in Felda Palong, about 150km from Seremban, Dr Ma-

hathir said it was up to the people to choose who they wanted to lead them in the government.

He said the Barisan had called for an early election because it wanted to give the opposition parties a chance to prove that they really had the support of the people.

"We trust the people's ability to choose the go-

vernment that they want," he said.

Dr Mahathir, who was visiting the second State in his nation-wide tour, later declared open a government clinic in the Felda scheme.

Also present were Mentri Besar Datuk Isa Abdul Samad, the Barisan candidate for Jempol constituency Haji Khalid Yunus and Encik Baharrudin Hassan.