

Activist group's rights protected but not absolute

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By SABRY SHARIF

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. — The freedom and democratic rights of the activist minority would be protected, but not at the expense of the majority, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

While the Government would ensure that the activist minority would continue to enjoy their rights, it would not allow the well-being and rights of the silent majority to be threatened.

The democratic rights and freedom of the majority of the people would be given priority over those of the small group or individuals, he said.

Opening the 35th annual general assembly of the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) at the Wisma MCA here, Dr Mahathir said: "Freedom and democracy in Malaysia must take into consideration the interest of the silent majority, to ensure that they are not exploited or oppressed by the activist minority.

"While the Government will not suppress the freedom and rights of the minority groups and individuals, the actions of the latter should not jeopardise the general well-being of society."

Earlier, Dr Mahathir was given a standing ovation by the 899 MCA delegates.

The AGM also observed a one-minute silence as a mark of respect to two former MCA presidents who died recently, Tun Tan Siew Sin and Tun Sir H.S. Lee.

In his 20-minute speech, Dr Mahathir spelled out the realities of democracy in Malaysia.

Malaysia as a plural society could not afford to practise democracy like in the advanced countries as the people would suffer the brunt of the actions by the few so-called upholders of freedom.

The Government, he said, had to

ensure a balance between respecting the freedom and rights of the two groups — the active minority and the "silent majority".

The multiracial composition of the country required diplomacy and sincerity in resolving many of the sensitive problems. If not, such sensitive issues would be exploited to disunite Malaysians.

He said this was why the Barisan Nasional resolved sensitive problems behind closed doors and, despite differing opinions, aimed at finding solutions acceptable to the majority of its members.

Differences of opinion among the Barisan Nasional members would not be allowed to "create a rift in the coalition".

Dr Mahathir said although there had been one or two component parties which had been emotional when dealing with sensitive problems, "wisdom had prevailed".

He stressed that the Barisan Nasional continued its consensus system of resolving problems, in the interest of the people and nation.

On the economic recovery, Dr Mahathir advised all quarters against taking any action or making statements which would directly or indirectly retard this development.

He said it was clear from the recovery that the Government's prudent financial management and continued preservation of political stability in the past few years had paid off.

But, he regretted critics of the Government who were trying to mislead the people by saying that the economic recovery was due solely to the rising prices of Malaysia's commodities.

"It is true that there has been an increase in the external demand for our raw exports. But there are countries which cannot reap this benefit because

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