

BN MUST BE STRONG: PM

By Joseph Chin

PENANG, Sat. — The Government must be strong, even if this means taking action that may be unpopular with some people, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said that a strong government could act effectively in the people's interest, and urged Barisan Nasional component party leaders to co-operate to ensure this.

The Prime Minister's speech at a closed-door meeting with 300 Barisan leaders and members at Komtar here was relayed by his political secretary, Encik Noor Azam, to reporters.

Among those present were Chief Minister Dr Lim Chong Eu, Penang Umno Baru chief Anwar Ibrahim, State MCA chairman Dr Sak Cheng Lum and State Gerakan chief Datuk Tan Gim Hwa.

According to Encik Noor Azam, the Prime Minister said that a weak government might not be able to come up with policies that could benefit the people.

Dr Mahathir also told the meeting that there had been talk during the Johore Baru by-election of not supporting the Barisan so as to weaken Umno Baru and the Government. "This is a dangerous idea," he added.

Dr Mahathir, who is Barisan chairman, said that a weak government would enable certain parties to make demands for their own self-interests.

"The system of co-operation that exists now must be safeguarded and each Barisan member must ensure that the Government continues to be strong."

He said that although the present system might not be perfect, it was the most suitable for a multi-racial country like Malaysia.

The Prime Minister said that a new system must not be tried out to test the Government's strength.

He said there might be differences of opinion among the races, but the Government had been successful in preventing racial conflicts by having strong leaders.

He urged the Barisan component parties to work together to strengthen the present system.

Encik Noor Azam said Dr Mahathir earlier met State Umno Baru leaders and told them to place the interests of the party and the race above their own.

"Dr Mahathir told them that a strong party was more important than a strong leader," Encik Noor Azam said.

He said the Prime Minister also told them that Umno Baru needed to be strong not only for the sake of the Malays but for all the races.