

Dr M on the need for a strong Umno

By Nor Hawa Yunus

MUAR, Fri. Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad urged the Malays to rally together under one banner Umno so that the party maintains its position as the backbone of the Barisan Nasional.

He said this was vital for Malay interest as it was important for the continued existence of the coalition.

"The coalition will not succeed if there is no backbone or if there is no party which is strong enough to lend support to the others," he said when opening the Pagoh Umno division delegates' conference at the Dewan Intan Jubilee.

Johore Mentri Besar Tan Sri Haji Muhyiddin Yassin, who was returned unopposed as Pagoh division

chairman, declared Johore Umno's undivided support to the party leadership under Dr Mahathir.

The Prime Minister said the role of the Malays in the country would be reduced if the proposed coalition of several Malay Opposition parties formed the next Government in coalition with the other Opposition parties.

Such a coalition of Malay parties — the proposed Angkatan Perpaduan Umamah (APU) — would not be able to protect the interests of the Malays as it believed it would only win 40 seats in the next general election. Some Semangat 46 leaders had said that the party could win about 40 seats in the next election.

Dr Mahathir said the group aspired to secure just enough seats in the De-

wan Kakyat to form the next Government by teaming with other Opposition parties.

He said no other party could play a similar role like Umno in safeguarding the interests of the Malays, without ignoring the rights of the other communities.

The Prime Minister said the country was peaceful today because Umno was strong and so became the backbone of the Barisan Nasional to protect the interest of everyone in the country.

"If Umno is only one of the members of the Barisan Nasional and not the backbone, the coalition will not last or be able to rule the country effectively. It is imperative, therefore,

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Representation of non-Malays assured

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that Malays ensure that Umno continues to remain strong and stable.

"Umno is our machinery towards a better life for the community and the nation. We must strengthen this machinery.

"If we have three machineries and three drivers with very different views (in reference to Umno, Pas and the Semangat 46) the community will be split and weak."

In Malacca, the Prime Minister assured non-Malays that their representation in Government would not be affected even when the Malays become the majority in the urban areas, reports Ho Kay Tat.

"They will get the same representation, but we will organise it in a way which will guarantee the position of both the Malays and non-Malays," Dr Mahathir said at the opening of the Umno Kota Melaka division meeting.

He said it was not the intention of the Malays in

Umno to build a strong and united party in order to take away the rights of others.

"All we want is to be equal in the economy, education and other fields. We want to have equal respect."

He said if Umno had been a party of extremists who only cared for the Malays, there would not be peace and progress in the country as happened in certain countries which gained independence at about the same time.

"When the colonial power left, these countries were ruled by extremists who chased out the migrant people leading to chaos and these countries remain backward even now."

Dr Mahathir said the strength of Umno was therefore the foundation of peace and progress enjoyed by the people.

However, he warned the people not to take for granted what they now had and assumed that it existed naturally.

He said it was important

that Umno — a party of moderate Malays — remained strong and was the anchor of the Government.

The Prime Minister said the Barisan Nasional would break up if every coalition party was equally strong, as everyone would fight to take over the anchor role played by Umno.

"But because we now have a strong Umno acting as the backbone of the coalition, the other parties will rally around it and we can then form a united and strong Barisan Nasional," he said.

"When there is a strong Umno, there will be a strong Barisan Nasional."

He added that he was happy the Kota Melaka division had decided on its leadership without a contest for all posts.

He said it was not undemocratic just because there was no contest for posts.

Also present were Catin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali and Chief Minister Datuk Seri Rahim Tamby Chik.