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KULIM, OCT 20 (BERNAMA) -- UMNO PRESIDENT (DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD SAID TODAY UMNO'S STRENGTH SHOULD BE MAINTAINED SO THAT IT WOULD CONTINUE TO BE THE DOMINANT PARTNER OF THE BARISAN NASIONAL (BN).

+IF UMNO IS NOT STRONG IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT FOR US TO FORM A STRONG GOVERNMENT AND A WEAK GOVERNMENT WOULD NOT BE RESPECTED, ESPECIALLY BY FOREIGN COUNTRIES,+ THE PRIME MINISTER SAID AT A MEETING OF KULIM BN LEADERS WITH LOCAL RESIDENTS HERE.

HIS WIFE, DATUK SERI DATIN PADUKA DR SITI HASMAH, AND BN CANDIDATE FOR THE KULIM-BANDAR BARU PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY, DATUK ABDUL KADIR SHEIKH FADZIR, AND BN CANDIDATE FOR THE PADANG SERAI PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY, PUAN LIM LAY HOON, WERE AMONG THE 4,000 PEOPLE PRESENT AT THE GATHERING.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID: +HOWEVER, WE WANT UMNO TO BE STRONG NOT BECAUSE WE WANT TO SUPPRESS ANYONE BUT MERELY TO FORM A STRONG AND STABLE GOVERNMENT. THIS IS ALSO FOR THE GOOD OF EVERYONE.+

HE SAID THAT UMNO WAS NOT GREEDY FOR POWER AND THE PARTY, ON THE CONCEPT OF COOPERATION OF ALL RACES, ALLOWED NON-MALAY CANDIDATES TO CONTEST IN MALAY MAJORITY CONSTITUENCIES. -- MORE  
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+FOR EXAMPLE, WE ONLY FIELDED UMNO CANDIDATES IN 86 OF THE 93 CONSTITUENCIES WHICH WE KNOW HAVE A MAJORITY OF MALAY VOTERS,+ HE SAID, ADDING THAT THAT PRINCIPLE HAD NEVER CHANGED.

ON THE ECONOMY, THE PRIME MINISTER SAID THAT MALAYSIA WAS PLACED FIFTH AFTER SOUTH KOREA, HONG KONG, TAIWAN AND SINGAPORE IN THE LIST OF 135 DEVELOPING COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD LAST YEAR.

HE SAID THAT THE LIST WAS COMPILED BY SEVERAL INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES AND THIS PROVED THAT THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMIC GROWTH WAS STABLE, ADDING THAT THE GOVERNMENT WAS CONFIDENT THE SITUATION WOULD NOT CHANGE UNTIL THE END OF THE YEAR.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID THAT THE COMPILATION OF THE LIST DID NOT ONLY TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE PER CAPITA INCOME BUT ALSO DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES, INDUSTRIALISATION AND ABILITY TO SERVICE INTERNAL AND FOREIGN DEBTS.

HE ALSO SAID THAT THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMY WAS NOT ADVERSELY AFFECTED BY THE GULF CRISIS BECAUSE IT HAS A STABLE SOURCE OF OIL.

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