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UNITY AND STABILITY BN'S AGENDA UNDER MAHATHIR

(Bernama Feature in conjunction with Barisan Nasional's 20th anniversary on August 24. This is the last in a six-part series).

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(Bm)

*Profile*

KUALA LUMPUR: The door of the Barisan Nasional (BN) is always open to all.

BN is an organisation which maximises the country's political energies and resources.

But its struggles are based on certain specific principles. Any party which accepts these principles can become its member.

These were the words of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad when he took over the country's and BN's helm 13 years ago. And 13 years later, these words are as relevant now as then.

Dr Mahathir made the remarks as the BN was gearing to face the 1982 general election. And now, the BN is again on the verge of yet another election which is expected to be held very soon.

The entry of the breakaway parties of the Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) into the BN fold recently following the collapse of the PBS state government in Sabah, once again demonstrates that the coalition front under Dr Mahathir practises what it preaches.--more

▼20/08/13-54MST

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BN'S AGENDA 2 BERNAMA FEATURE

Dr. Mahathir wants BN to give any party which accepts its principles of struggle a chance to be a member so that none will feel deprived or left out.

It is Dr Mahathir who uses the New Economic Policy (NEP) as a means to strike a balance between economic development and political stability.

Moderation forms the basis for BN actions, with unity and national integration the main agenda. The most dramatic move was turning Malaysia into a single time zone which at one stroke bridges the psychological gulf between Peninsular Malaysia with Sabah and Sarawak.

Despite the vast expanse of the South China Sea that separates the two regions, Sabah and Sarawak are treated in the same manner as other states in the peninsula.

Dr Mahathir made it clear at the outset of taking over as Prime Minister that Sabah and Sarawak shouldn't adopt the attitude that they are special vis a vis the Federal Government because in a federation-type of government, all states are equal.

And the quicker people of both states start to think as Malaysians and not as Sabahans or Sarawakians, the speedier the process of national integration be achieved. --more

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BN'S AGENDA 3 BERNAMA FEATURE

The Prime Minister chose the theme: "A Clean, Efficient and Trustworthy Government" as the BN manifesto to face the first poll under his leadership. Leading up to this, he directed all ministers, Mentris Besar and Chief Ministers to declare their assets to him.

Leadership By Example, the Clock-In system for government servants, Malaysia Incorporated, Look East Policy and Application of Islamic Values were among some of new slogans that came into the day to day life of Malaysians, aimed at an all-round improvement to government machinery towards the dream of making Malaysia into a country its citizens are proud of.

For the sake of national unity and unity among Muslims in the country, Dr Mahathir sent out an olive branch to PAS to rejoin the Barisan Nasional. But PAS responded to Dr Mahathir's magnanimous gesture by putting a candidate against him for the Kubang Pasu parliamentary constituency in the April 1982 general election.

What Dr Mahathir had in mind by inviting PAS back into the BN fold was to bring back the "peace and tranquility" that prevailed in the country's political environment and among Muslims in the country when the party was a BN member in 1973-74.

He had called for an earlier than expected poll to obtain a fresh mandate from the people so that he could concentrate and give a kick start to his ambitious economic development plans.--more

▼20/08/15-12MST

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BN'S AGENDA 4 BERNAMA FEATURE

The BN won a decisive victory at the polls. With this new mandate, Dr Mahathir set out to lead the government by injecting more liberal and open policies. Open criticisms including from among BN component parties were tolerated.

This new spirit of openness led to even closer rapport among BN component parties.

Four years later in the run-up to the 1986 general election, unity was again made a major issue. The Prime Minister asked the people to reject candidates who championed selfish or parochial causes that would only lead to destabilising the country and undermine its racial harmony.

Dr. Mahathir's appeal won wide support from the electorate as the BN swept back into power with a two-thirds majority. And while the MCA and Gerakan performed below expectation, the DAP failed to achieve its dream of capturing the state government in Penang.

BN won 148 parliamentary seats, with the DAP securing 24 seats, independents with four seats while PAS only managed to win one seat.

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BN'S AGENDA 5 BERNAMA FEATURE

The victory demonstrated the people's unflappable desire to opt for continued political stability and racial harmony and to reject narrow-minded politicking. The crisis in UMNO triggered by the resignation of Datuk Musa Hitam as Deputy Prime Minister and Deputy Umno President as well as the then prevailing economic recession, did not dent the people's massive support for Dr Mahathir's leadership.

The BN cabinet formed after the election lost no time in tackling problems to restore the economy with special emphasis on overcoming the unemployment problem and to push for increased foreign investments.

Dr. Mahathir's strong rebuff for the opposition for fanning racialist sentiment when raising the issue of the NEP generated support from the BN component parties, which wanted the NEP to continue after its expiry in 1990.

Dr Mahathir appointed his deputy Encik Ghafar Baba to head a high-level committee to review the implementation of the NEP and to find means to achieve its targets.

The National Economic Consultative Council (Mapen) was formed to formulate the national economic policies beyond 1990. Mapen drew its members from a cross-section of professionals and politicians who recommended that the gist and philosophy of the NEP be retained for the next national economic policy.--more

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BN'S AGENDA 6 (last) BERNAMA FEATURE

Although UMNO faced its fiercest internal battle when party stalwart Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah led a group to challenge Dr Mahathir's leadership in 1987 -- which was later to lead to UMNO's deregistration -- Dr Mahathir's leadership of the BN remained intact.

Leaders of the BN component parties rallied behind him by asking him to continue leading the coalition until UMNO had sorted out its own problems.

And Tengku Razaleigh, who had since formed the splinter Semangat 46 Party failed to gain ground in the 1990 general election, let alone fulfilling his dream of forming the new government. But Semangat 46 played a big part in helping PAS to capture the Kelantan State Government from the BN. The DAP, meanwhile, again failed to get Penang.

Now, the BN's election machinery has started to be mobilised for the coming polls expected to be held at any time. But speculations are still divided over the election date, with some saying it will be held this year and some others predicting early next year as the the more likely date.

With the fall of the PBS government in Sabah, the BN can now focus on Kelantan and Penang. Can Dr Mahathir marshal the BN to capture Kelantan this time?. Or will the BN again succeed to deny the DAP from grabbing Penang?.--Bernama

RS AU

▼20/08/16-10MST