

BN concept has brought stability, says Mahathir

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KUALA LUMPUR: The Barisan Nasional concept of multi-racial co-operation, moderation and tolerance has taken the country forward to its present status despite scepticism, especially from foreigners.

Prime Minister and Barisan chairman Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said here last night that the stability and unity in the country had given confidence to foreign investors and the economic cake had grown bigger to be shared by all.

"This has placed Malaysia as the 19th biggest trading nation in the world. We have attained this through the Barisan concept of co-operation," he said at the coalition's 20th anniversary celebrations at Dataran Merdeka.

The people, he said, should be grateful for the peace and prosperity they enjoyed which no other country with such a multi-racial society could claim to enjoy.

"We feel safe to gather here without fear of those from other races. We walk the streets without feeling the insecurity of a racial riot erupting," he said.

"Compare this with the US where, in New York for example, everyone you talk to will tell you that it is not safe to go to

the 42nd Street, or here, there and everywhere despite the presence of police officers."

Dr Mahathir said this was the biggest success achieved by Malaysia where the 14 Barisan component parties representing different races had managed to work together ever since the concept of multi-racialism was laid first by the Alliance before independence, and from 1974, by the Barisan.

He said the foreign media had laughed at Malaysia and the Barisan, describing the co-operation as merely superficial. They predicted racial hostilities would erupt in a matter of time.

"After the formation of the Barisan in 1974, they said Malaysia would suffer from racial riots," Dr Mahathir said.

"They were cynical of our ability to rule the country and believed that only the British, our former colonial masters, could do it.

"They predicted racial riots would occur in 1975 but it did not happen. They then predicted the following year, then the next and the next but it never happened."

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia not only continued to be more united, but it prospered and managed to even buy over big firms and plantations be-

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longing to the British.

He said the wealth acquired by the country had not only been enjoyed by the rich but had benefitted others, too.

Dr Mahathir said that after the 1969 racial riots, the Barisan took the initiative to work out a system for a more equitable distribution of wealth regardless of race.

"To us, poverty must be eradicated. Hunger has no racial boundary."

Dr Mahathir said the poor in Malaysia today were those who were reluctant to work.

"The presence of one million foreign workers shows that jobs are in abundance and we have to bring in foreigners to fill the vacancies," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the successes achieved so far did not mean that the efforts to develop the country had been completed.

Efforts, he said, must continue to be carried out to make Malaysia a developed and industrialised nation by the year 2020.

"From our understanding of the need for moderation and non-extremism, we have been able to enjoy the best the country can offer," he said.

Dr Mahathir said democracy provided the people the opportunity to determine their leaders.

He said that as the Barisan had proved itself capable and effective throughout its rule of the country, he saw no reason why the people should change the leadership.

He said the Barisan had carried out

its responsibilities so well that Sabah had returned to the coalition.

"I hope other opposition parties will realise the futility of their struggle. If the parties are still not prepared to join our ranks, their members are welcomed to do so.

"Our doors are open as long as they are not joining Barisan for personal gains."

Dr Mahathir said the Barisan still held to the concept of its formation that the Malays were not out to rule the country on their own to suppress the other races.

"Our hope is that the other races will reciprocate with similar understanding," he said.