

Accept criticism, PM tells leaders

By Farush Khan

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today he wanted leaders of the Government and the Barisan Nasional to accept constructive criticism from within and not label these critics as traitors.

He said these leaders should be prepared to accept criticism if there were justifiable grounds, analyse their actions and take appropriate action.

"Do not be arrogant just because the BN won overwhelmingly in the general election," Dr Mahathir said when opening the 24th Gerakan national delegates' conference today.

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Dr M: Convey criticism at closed-door meetings

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Gerakan president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik and BN component party leaders, including MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik as well as MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu, were present.

Dr Mahathir said while the BN's resounding victory was something to be proud of, it had also posed a "big danger" as the leaders might be led into believing they were "too smart and efficient".

He said party leaders should not be satisfied with their own views since the Opposition was not strong.

He said listening to criticism and rectifying their weaknesses would help the leaders consolidate the people's confidence.

Dr Mahathir, who is also the BN chairman, reminded members to convey their criticism at closed-door meetings instead of voicing their grouses openly, including through the media, to prevent the Opposition from capitalising on them.

He said voicing criticism openly to attract attention would make it difficult for

the Government or the BN to correct mistakes or for the critics themselves to admit later that their views had no basis.

"If criticisms are clearly presented at closed-door meetings, the party, or even the Government, can explain and defend the matter, or accept the criticisms and correct the mistakes," he said.

This closed-door method, he said, was better although the media would not like it as they would not have controversial material to report.

Dr Mahathir said the leaders must also not close their ears to criticisms from the public made through the media, for example.

"I am making this reminder because in any struggle, there are ups and downs. Today we are up.

"We can continue to remain at this level only if we are careful, responsible and not arrogant and conceited.

"If we are complacent and arrogant we will definitely fall.

"The people have a short memory. They are easily forgetful and will not re-

member our past contributions if we do something they do not like," he said.

He said as such the leaders should bear in mind the mandate given in the election was for them to serve and contribute to the people.

"With this in mind, we should therefore work harder for the religion, race and country," he added.

Asked later about the possibility of members not feeling free to criticise their leaders at the closed-door meetings for fear of being blacklisted, Dr Mahathir said such fear should not exist.

Asked to comment on the level of acceptance to criticisms among the BN leaders now, the Prime Minister said there had been cases when leaders equated criticisms by their members with those of the Opposition.

"(The leaders) should not react that way.

"If he (a member) criticises we should listen.

"Don't condemn him because he sounds like the Opposition," he added.

In his speech, Dr Ma-

hathir also said some quarters claimed that the BN had won because of the country's encouraging economic achievement and that the media did not give wide coverage to the Opposition.

"These quarters, including the foreign media, did not give credit to the wisdom and maturity of the Malaysian people," he said, adding that the people could evaluate the country's performance and achievement compared to other developing and even developed nations.

While the foreign newspapers were making projections to discredit the country, the Malaysian people were aware of the actual situation in the country.

"The people do not need others to make an assessment and analysis on the country's situation (for them)," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the people knew the analyses and reports by these parties were done only to see Malaysia "fall in ruins" as Malaysia never hesitated to criticise them when they erred.