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Barisan to remain a coalition party for now

Ashraf Abdullah; Chok Suat Ling

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the Barisan Nasional was not ready to become a single party representing all races and would remain a coalition until the idea of a single party was accepted by all.

Dr Mahathir, who is also BN chairman, said this was not only to ensure that parties representing the various races would have a say, but also to protect the rights of the minorities.

"We feel that we should continue as a coalition because in a coalition no one will lose his right to speak up by reason of being a minority group," Dr Mahathir said after chairing the BN meeting at the Putra World Trade Centre.

Asked when a single BN would become a reality, he said: "We feel that the time has not come. The time comes when we all forget that we are Malays, Chinese, Indians, Japanese or whatever, and consider ourselves only as Malaysians."

Stressing the need for a coalition to protect the interests of the minorities, he said: "In a coalition, everyone will have a say. If we have one party the majority group may dominate all the places in the party and the small group will not have enough votes."

Asked whether retaining the BN as a coalition would be inconsistent with the proposal to create a Malaysian race, he said: "We are trying to create a Malaysian race, but up to now we have still not evolved a national language."

He said the national language was still being referred to as Bahasa Melayu by certain parties, giving the impression that the language belonged only to the Malays.

"Some say this is not the national language, this is the Malay language ... and (they) get angry if it is called the national language. So, if it is not the national language and is called the Malay language, is it only for Malays?"

Dr Mahathir said the Government was still continuing with efforts to create a Malaysian race despite the obstacles posed by many parties.

Asked whether the obstacles came from within the BN, he said there were obstacles everywhere, including from the media.

Dr Mahathir also announced the appointments of all Menteri Besar and Chief Ministers as chairmen of their respective State BN.

Deputy Information Minister Datuk Suleiman Mohamed was appointed chairman of the Federal Territory BN. He is also the chairman of Federal Territory Umno.

Dr Mahathir said it was also decided that the BN should hold its meeting at least once a year.

The last BN meeting was held in 1994.

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