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Mahathir-Gerakan

BN REMAINS THE BULWARK TO DEFEND NATIONAL ECONOMY

KUALA LUMPUR, June 27 (Bernama) -- Datuk Sri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the Barisan Nasional will remain as a strong bulwark in defending the national economy from being taken over by foreigners as long as party members and component parties are not taken in by foreign propaganda.

In view of this, party members and BN component parties should not allow themselves to be influenced by mischievous allegations that the government was practising cronyism, crony-capitalism and nepotism.

"We realise that the economic problems are very serious and difficult to overcome but we have been able to withstand so far because the main factor in the defence of the nation is still strong that is political stability," he said when opening the Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia party general assembly in Cheras near here.

He said attempts to topple the government were clearly being made with such accusations against the government but as long as such claims came from foreigners they would not have any effect.

However if Malaysians themselves were influenced by such foreign propaganda then the country's political stability would be jeopardised, the Prime Minister said.

Dr Mahathir said the economic problems were not due to any maladministration as the government did not do anything out of the ordinary in June of last year but all of a sudden it was accused of doing so.

"In the 40 years of independence, Malaysia developed moderately and later rapidly with the drawback only in 1969 (May 13 incident)," he said.

That problem too was overcome by Malaysia itself without anybody's assistance, he added.

The government came up with more just policies and there was peace in the country with economic growth rate at eight per cent for 10 years.

"Suddenly in June 1997... this very successful government is accused of nepotism, cronyism, corruption etc. If we practise nepotism why was the economic growth rate good and the ringgit remained stable at RM2.50 to the dollar," he said.

The fall in the value of the ringgit and share prices was caused by foreigners out to make profits and they accused the government of practising cronyism, crony capitalism and nepotism which were in fact excuses for them to attack the ringgit and make profits to the tune of billions.

Dr Mahathir said foreigners could lay the blame on the government "but when we get influenced by their propaganda and accuse the government of the same, then we will face a problem... a problem of political instability."

He said if that happened efforts to revive the economy would be stifled and would be made worse if BN component parties quarrelled as this would weaken the government.

"Hence we cannot have problems in the party and within the BN. I am confident that the BN component parties particularly Gerakan will not allow foreigners to take control of our economy," he said.

He said it was the task of all BN component parties and their members to strengthen unity and shoulder jointly the responsibility of defending the nation.

Dr Mahathir was given a standing ovation by the more than 1,800 Gerakan delegates when the Prime Minister commended the Gerakan for conducting party proceedings and election of party leaders without any problem and for

sticking to the slogan "One Heart, One Nation, One Vision."

The BN Chairman said the slogan was not only for the Gerakan as it also summed up the aspirations of the BN itself, which wanted all 14 component parties to be of one heart, one vision and think of one nation.

In a lighter vein, Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno President said based on the slogan the election of the Gerakan leadership had taken place without any boxing but he could not guarantee that there would be no boxing in the Umno elections next year.

He also explained why Malaysia did not seek foreign aid including that from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) despite the 12-month economic turmoil.

He said this was because the conditions were too stiff and would be a loss to Malaysia.

"We can still defend our economy without foreign assistance... we can see that countries which accepted IMF assistance have also not recovered and are unable to overcome their economic problems," he said.

Dr Mahathir reiterated that with the strength and solidarity in the BN, the government would remain strong and have the capacity to defend the country's independence and freedom.

Dr Mahathir said the BN Government would continue with its just policies which had benefited all levels of society and as they did not seek to grab the riches of the wealthy to give to the poor but stressed on expanding the economy with each getting the due share.

Speaking at a news conference later, Dr Mahathir said, "the Gerakan slogan is good for the whole BN and it also showed that we must learn to get closer together... of course the day has not yet come when we can forget our racial origins but at least we can overcome other barriers."

On whether the current economic slowdown was affecting the BN, he said it only tended to bring the BN closer together.

"For example when foreigners said I should step down, every BN component party rallied behind me and told those foreigners that no outside party should decide for Malaysians who should rule Malaysia," he said.

On the action against those who accused the government of practising nepotism and cronyism, he said no action would be taken but "We will expose them as being fraud, people who have a political agenda that favours them rather than the nation."

He said there was no basis for the allegations as he had proved that at the recent Umno General Assembly by distributing the list of those who had benefited from the government's privatised projects.

-- BERNAMA
MNY AAM