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Malaysians must not be dictated to by the West

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MALAYSIANS should not allow the country to be dictated to by the West. They must have their own plans and take into consideration the various cultures and traditions in developing the country, Barisan Nasional and Umno leaders said yesterday.

Sharing Umno president and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's aspiration that all Malaysians should work together to defend the country's independence, they said this is the only effective way for the nation to emerge from the economic doldrums.

Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who described Dr Mahathir's speech as pragmatic and realistic, said the future of the country lies in the hands of its own people.

"The Malaysian situation is not a duplicate of any situation in any other country. There should be a Malaysian prescription for the Malaysian situation, applicable in all areas - whether economic, social or strategic," he said.

Abdullah said Dr Mahathir is not calling for total rejection of foreign ideas, and said that one should be able to weigh the good and bad aspects of an idea. "Accept it if it is good. If there is a need to make adjustments, do so," he advised.

MCA president and Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said Dr Mahathir's speech at the opening of the Umno 52nd General Assembly yesterday was a clear message not only to Umno members but everyone else as well.

Dr Mahathir took great pains to explain what and why the currency manipulators did and how it affected the economy, Dr Ling said.

He added that the Prime Minister said if this continues, it will see Malaysia in the clutches of the International Monetary Fund which will make demands of Malaysia just as it did with Indonesia and Thailand.

"We will slide back into history. We will lose what the New Economic Policy (NEP) has given us ... ability, harmony and prosperity ... something that all Malaysians have to defend," he told reporters after the opening ceremony.

MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu said the country should continue with the implementation of the NEP as it is the only effective policy which has and will continue to unite the various races in the country.

"I feel that if we follow his advice, we will get out of the economic problems which we currently face," he said.

Umno veteran Tan Sri Mustaffa Jabar said capitalists are trying to break up the harmonious relations between races in the country through the economy.

"People in the country should not be influenced by external forces. We do not want present economic problems to lead to political instability. We have to prevent this from happening," he said.

Parti Demokratik Sabah president and Sabah Chief Minister Tan Sri Bernard Dompok urged all Malaysians to unite and work together to resolve the current economic problems.

"I feel that the call by the Prime Minister for all Malaysians to stand and work together to face the problems in the country is very timely," he added.

The Government, he said, has to continue to take affirmative action to assist the less fortunate and ensure equal distribution of wealth among

the various communities.

"If you look at all the efforts that are being done to restructure society and correct imbalances among the various communities, there is certainly room for a certain amount of affirmative action.

"This (affirmative action) is needed to assist the less fortunate and ensure that the pie in Malaysia is divided equitably among the various communities.

"I think this is the policy that is well received by Malaysians," he said.

Umno veteran and former deputy prime minister Tan Sri Musa Hitam said that at a time the country is facing economic problems, Malaysians should stand united and support the present leadership.

"In times of difficulties, the leadership of any country needs support and it is good to hear the different sectors of the community in the country express their support for the Prime Minister.

"I believe that as far as Umno or the party's annual general assembly is concerned, there will be a show of support for the leadership and Dr Mahathir himself as the one who has to handle the problems that we are facing now," he said, when asked how he viewed the show of support for Dr Mahathir at the party's general assembly.

"We have accepted the fact that the country is facing a crisis and that in such a situation, the leadership needs support. I am sure party members will give it," he said.

Leaders also commented on cronyism, saying that Dr Mahathir's statement on the matter is a reminder of the dangers of labelling others.

Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Mohd Najib Abdul Razak said the country has "created leaders in all areas, including the corporate field, who have the ability and confidence to manage large corporations and enterprises".

Dr Ling said "crony" is not such a bad word in the Malaysian context. "Everybody has benefited ... I now hear everybody going around saying it."

He censured the Western media for trying to divide and rule Malaysians. "We will not allow that," he said.

RHB chairman Tan Sri Rashid Hussain said he does not see "cronyism" as a cliché. "The party has its own struggles and there are various definitions of what cronyism is about."

Umno veteran and former foreign minister Tan Sri Ghazalie Shafie said Dr Mahathir has given his interpretation of cronyism while others have theirs. "I am not saying whether I agree or disagree (with Dr Mahathir's interpretation) ... I think he has a point."

Gerakan president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik said, "God help those who are cronies because today they are the first to go bankrupt."

Umno veteran Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah said there are many ways to weigh cronyism as "one definition does not fit one party and people use the definition for their own purpose.

"Definitions change all the time. I myself believe that this is a small matter. What is important is to find a solution to the problem," he said.

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