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`Place BN before personalities' call

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THE people must always place Barisan Nasional (BN) before personalities because leaders come and go but the party's struggles will remain, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad says.

"BN does not want support that is personal in nature as such support will vanish when particular leaders leave the party," he told a meet-the-rakyat gathering at a packed soccer field in Taman Sri Keramat yesterday. Any form of support that is personality-based can have disastrous consequences should the leader's goals be different from that of the party, the BN chairman and Umno president said.

"We have seen one of our party leaders expelled... members should not follow him and start opposing the party. We are in the party not for personal reasons.

"We are here because we share in the party's struggles to develop the country and champion the nation's interests," he added.

In fact, many Umno leaders had left the movement, either because of expulsion or resignation, but they did not set up a different party to oppose Umno.

"Instead, they continued to support Umno. In this, they are truly Umno-spirited... even when they have lost their positions, they do not condemn Umno or BN," Dr Mahathir said.

Umno was not set up because it hated certain people. It was established to pursue the nation's interests and further develop the country, he said. Trying to influence others to follow a leader who has left is not healthy because the ultimate aim of the party is the betterment, progress and defence of the dignity of the nation and race.

"If I were to leave the BN, don't follow me because that is not the wish of the party... efforts to ensure rapid economic development must continue. This is to enable Malaysians to stand as tall as other people, taller than the Petronas Twin Towers, the tallest building in the world," he added.

The world has now to accept that Malaysia is capable of settling its own problems without any foreign help.

"President (Bill) Clinton has admitted that Malaysia can (do it). Even the arrogant and strong IMF (International Monetary Fund) has acknowledged that Malaysia has succeeded in reviving its economy.

"We have devised our own ways to revive the country's economy. Today, our economy has recovered."

At a press conference later, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia feels that any external support for Indonesia in resolving the East Timor crisis should come from Asean. "We feel that it is more proper for Asean, rather than countries like Australia, to send peacekeeping troops to East Timor," he said.

In fact, Malaysia has expressed willingness to assist Indonesia and this has been conveyed to President B.J. Habibie.

"Whether Malaysia is capable or not in the eyes of other nations is a different issue. Indonesia has ruled East Timor for the last 25 years... the territory is still Jakarta's responsibility," he added.

Dr Mahathir was also asked about Canada's reported intention to seek Commonwealth condemnation of the imprisonment of Canadian journalist Murray Hiebert.

He said Malaysia could as easily seek similar action against Canada.

"Canada has oppressed the Indians for tens, hundreds of years (and) we never condemned them. Canadian natives had for years been asking for the return of their land but their demands have been ignored," he said. Hiebert, Malaysian bureau chief of the Hong Kong-based Far Eastern Economic Review, was taken to prison on Saturday after the Court of Appeal upheld an earlier conviction for contempt of court.

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