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Focus-BN

THE BARISAN NASIONAL, A UNIQUE POLITICAL FORMULA

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KUALA LUMPUR: When the late Tun Abdul Razak set up the Barisan Nasional 25 years ago, he had also sown the seed for the flourishing of a unique Malaysian political formula.

The formula came about after the young nation went through several traumas, including the bloody racial riot of May 13, 1999.

That tragedy also became the turning point in Malaysian politics as it prompted the leaders then to search for the best solution, and the result was a system of consensus and power-sharing by all the races.

The Barisan Nasional, registered on June 1, 1974, is a unique Malaysian experiment because its members are not individuals but political parties.

Now, with more than four million members in the 14 component parties, the BN will mark its 25th anniversary this Sunday with a gathering of about 100,000 people at Bukit Jalil.

With the theme "Strongly United Towards the New Millennium", the celebration would also be observed simultaneously at the state level.

In the evening, the "BN family" and the rakyat will hear a keynote address by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who will, among other things, hark back to the history and struggle of the BN in the last quarter of a century.

The celebration is important to show the unity and strength of the coalition among its members, in order to face the forthcoming general election.

The BN had never lost a general election for the federal government since 1974 and if its predecessor, the Alliance, is taken into account, it had won all general elections since independence 42 years ago.

At the time of its birth, the BN consisted of nine parties -- Umno, MCA, MIC, PAS, Gerakan, PPP, SUPP, PBB and Perikatan Sabah. PAS was however expelled in 1977.

Now the BN is 14-member strong with five parties from the peninsula (Umno, MCA, MIC, Gerakan and PPP), five from Sabah (SAPP, LDP, PBRs, AKAR and PDS, the latter now called UPKO or United Pasok Momogun Kadazandusun Organisation) and four from Sarawak (SUPP, PBB, SNAP and PBDS).

In the last 25 years, the BN had expelled two component parties, PAS and Usno, while several others like Berjaya, Berjasa, Hamim and PBS withdrew or left the coalition. But they all did not weaken or dent the mettle of the coalition. Instead, the BN grew from strength to strength.

The strength of the BN is anchored by Umno and so long as Umno remains strong, it would not be easy to shake or rattle the coalition. The other component parties know this too well, and they always hope that Umno would continue to be strong and be the backbone of the coalition.

BN Secretary Datuk Seri Mohamed Rahmat said the celebration is apt because many people had forgotten the history of the nation before its independence and how the West had looked down on the people whom they regarded as stupid and lazy, and not capable of developing the nation.

"The rakyat are of diverse races, religions and cultures. The Western people cannot imagine that we can live in unity, they thought that when we became independent, we would have to use all our time, energy and wealth to resolve all kinds of problems.

"They thought that we would be mired in racial, religious and cultural quarrels like many other places in the world," he said.

The West felt this way because they have yet to resolve their own ethnic problems and this became a main issue in the late 20th century, said Mohamed.

Mohamed, who is former Information Minister, said racism would continue to be an issue in the new century and it could be a "time bomb" and a threat to many nations and governments with ethnic problems.

The Malaysian government has solved the racial problem through the BN and it attracted world attention. In fact, many foreign leaders had come to Malaysia for a closer look at the approach to overcome the problems of pluralism or ethnic issues, he said.

"We are grateful that our founding fathers had looked so far ahead for Malaysia. They realised early that Malaysia cannot be ruled just by one race, all the races must cooperate," he added.

The BN is no stranger to Mohamed, because he was a member of the delegation of Tun Razak during his historic visit to China in 1974 to establish diplomatic ties with Beijing. Mohamed had represented the Umno Youth then.

Tun Abdul Razak, the country's second prime minister, announced the formation of the BN on his return from China.

Mohamed said although there were more Malays in the early years of independence and that they had enough strength to set up the government on their own, they nevertheless invited the other races to share the power to rule. -- Bernama

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