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Wooing silent majority (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - After three days of hectic campaigning, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today broke away from his busy schedule to greet well-wishers.

The Barisan Nasional chairman was overwhelmed all day with expressions of support from groups representing the silent majority who had hitherto kept very much to themselves.

The 10th general election is the first to witness the emergence of these groups and people who are publicly expressing support for the BN.

Thirty representatives of the Malaysian Gurdwara Council, Sikh Youth Organisation and the 300,000-strong Malaysian Ex-Servicemen Association had met Dr Mahathir at his office in Putrajaya in the morning.

At the Bangsar Sports Complex in the city later, a delegation from the student organisation Pemuda Negara which sent 100 representatives, comprising undergraduates from the International Islamic University, Universiti Malaya, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Universiti Putra Malaysia and several private colleges, came unexpectedly to greet Dr Mahathir.

Speaking at a gathering of Federal Territory BN candidates and party workers at the complex afterwards, Dr Mahathir urged them to ensure that the voice and vote of every member of the silent majority is realised.

He said never before had he seen the silent majority making their voice heard as now.

He said some groups were also using their own money to place advertisements expressing support for the BN.

He said although these groups usually voted for the BN, "sometimes they think that the BN will win, so they don't come out to vote".

Dr Mahathir said the silent majority was the target group whose votes BN workers should work hard for.

"We want a bigger majority ... we want the silent majority to come out and vote," he said.

In order to do this, Dr Mahathir said the BN election machinery should ensure closer co-operation among component party election workers.

Citing an example, Dr Mahathir said victory in Malay-majority constituencies contested between Malay BN and Opposition candidates would be determined by votes from the Chinese and Indians.

"So they (BN component party workers) must come out and fully support the Umno candidates," he said.

Likewise, Dr Mahathir added that BN candidates in Chinese-majority constituencies must have the support of the Umno and MIC campaign machinery.

"We help them and they will help us," he said.

The Prime Minister said he was especially happy with the presence of the students.

"For a moment, I thought they were going to hold a protest demonstration but they came to show support for the BN instead."

He said it was a brave move because the Opposition had incited university students to such a degree that those who vocally supported the Government were heavily criticised.

"Because of this, many of them remain passive and do not dare to outwardly show their support for the Government."

Dr Mahathir said the Opposition, which had taken advantage of the BN's

refusal to disturb students with politics by planting agents among them to incite hatred, was now losing its influence.

"The students are beginning to open their eyes again and they realise that the Opposition attacks on the Government have no basis."

He added that although many of the students were not able to vote on Monday, "I believe they can influence their parents and friends back in their hometowns and kampungs."

Dr Mahathir urged undergraduates to play their role by explaining the truth about the Opposition to their friends and families back home.

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