

Leaders laud Dr Mahathir's statement on non-Malay PM

Nst 16 JUN 2000

MCA leaders lauded Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's statement that it might be possible one day for a non-Malay to become Prime Minister.

They also supported the call for the Chinese community to forge a genuine working relationship with other races, especially Bumiputeras.

MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said the Prime Minister's address at the 47th MCA general assembly would strengthen ties between the races.

"Promoting a genuine working relationship between the Bumiputeras and non-Bumiputeras for the benefit of society-at-large is a good proposal and all races should work together to realise this."

Vice-president Datuk Dr Fong Chan Onn said the party appreciated Dr Mahathir's emphasis that the Federal Constitution did not specify that the Prime Minister must be of any particular race.

"This shows Malaysia is a truly multi-ethnic country where racial origin is not taken into consideration where the position of Prime Minister is concerned.

"The MCA is happy with this and will continue to work with Barisan Nasional component parties towards strengthening mutual co-operation and respect."

Vice-president Datuk Chua Jui Meng said the Chinese community must unite and ensure that its votes count. "This is to enable us to lend our support to parties that represent the interests of the Chinese community."

MCA central committee member Datuk Hon Choon Kim said as the quest to establish a Malaysian race was progressing, any Malaysian could qualify to become a Prime Minister as long as he commanded support from the masses.

"By virtue of the fact that Umno is the biggest political party, hence the backbone of the country, it is only natural we have a Malay Prime Minister."

Asked when he foresaw a non-Malay becoming Prime Minister, Hon said in theory, it was possible.

"But we need time to sell' this concept (to the grassroots). The trend has already been set in motion as we see more Malays sending their children to Chinese schools, and younger Chinese and Indians being able to speak Malay so fluently that nobody will be able to know their racial roots."

Gerakan president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik saluted Dr Mahathir as "a brave man" who continued to provide inspiration to Malaysians to work towards a *Bangsa Malaysia* (Malaysian Race).

Dr Lim said he was "glad and exhilarated" as Dr Mahathir's words were an indication that non-racial politics was slowly but surely materialising.

Umno vice-president Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib expressed some reservation.

He said although the integration process in Malaysia had begun, it would take time before conditions would permit a non-Malay to become Prime Minister.

"It would be possible if all the communities in Malaysia were on an equal footing, but currently the Malays still have a lot of ground to catch up on in terms of economic development and such."

"When we reach a stage that no community is left behind, maybe the idea of having a non-Malay Prime Minister can be implemented."

Meanwhile, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Rais Yatim said the Prime Minister had raised this a few years ago in the context of assimilation.

He said it was a step in the national scheme of things for the future and it would be futile for any Malaysian to pretend otherwise.

He said there would be the ultra-religious who may not accept it but he believed that the statement was appropriate.