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Mahathir-Leaders

DR MAHATHIR CONFIDENT THAT A NON-MALAY CAN BECOME PM IN FUTURE

KUALA LUMPUR, June 17 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is confident that one day, when Malaysians of Chinese or Indian descent are accepted by all the races, the Malaysian prime minister need not come from among the Malays alone.

Non-Malay bumiputeras may also become the prime minister of the country, he said when opening the MCA's 47th general assembly, here.

"The process towards this end has started. Believe me, if we are all sensitive to the tastes of Malaysians, the issue of race and origin will no longer obstruct any Malaysian from holding any post," the prime minister said.

He said the Barisan Nasional (BN) component parties, including the MCA, should work towards this end with the approach that is unique to Malaysia.

"Cooperate in the political, economic and social fields and we will all eradicate racialism and accept just any Malaysian to become prime minister and fill any post," he said.

Dr Mahathir, who is also the BN chairman, said anyone of any race had the right to become prime minister because Malaysia's constitution did not mention the origin of the prime minister.

Speaking to reporters later, he said the appointment of a non-Malay as prime minister would depend on acceptance by the people.

"That is why we (BN) do not want to emphasise too much on differences. We want to emphasise similarities," he said.

He said this when asked how soon a non-Malay could become the prime minister of this country.

Asked further if this could happen during his lifetime, Dr Mahathir quipped: "It all depends on how long I live."

On whether his remarks would be well-received by Umno members, Dr Mahathir who is Umno president, said: "I think generally Umno accepts... they can accept leaders who are dedicated to the country.

"I am not trying to do something that will increase their (Umno's) dislike for me, I am just stating facts."

Asked whether this means that there would be more allocations for non-Malays in the Cabinet, Dr Mahathir said it was possible once the feelings of racism was done away with and a person was not identified by his race.

In his speech, Dr Mahathir also said that Malaysia belonged to all the people and that since Independence all the races had succeeded in closing ranks.

"Actually, sometimes we are so Malaysian that we cannot tell if a person is from the same race," he said.

In terms of clothing and manners, it is difficult to distinguish the Malays and bumiputeras from the Chinese or Indians, he added.

On the New Economic Policy (NEP), Dr Mahathir said the policy showed that improving the economic status of the bumiputeras did not affect the progress of the other races.

Aware that some Chinese were dissatisfied with the NEP, Dr Mahathir some bumiputera communities were also dissatisfied with the policy.

"If we share and cooperate, the number of malcontents will drop," he said.

Asked about allegations that the NEP had caused disunity among the races, he said that on the contrary, the policy had helped integrate the races.

"In some countries which have no such policy, they are more divided and do not recognise races. They claim to be one nation but deep inside they are different," he said.

In his speech, Dr Mahathir also touched on the benefits if the Chinese and bumiputeras had more genuine collaboration in business with the bumiputera partners playing a meaningful role that would give them experience and efficiency.

"Ali-Baba partnerships whereby the bumiputera is only a "front" do not help the process of transfer of efficiency in business," he said.

He believed that if the bumiputera partner was given a meaningful role, he would make valuable contribution to the partnership.

He said that if the bumiputeras progressed and became as rich as the other races, the country's progress would be enhanced and the average Malaysian income would improve further.

-- BERNAMA

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