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Malaysia belongs to all (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is confident that there will come a day when Malaysians of Chinese or Indian descent are accepted by all races and then, the Prime Minister need not necessarily be a Malay.

He said in the same way, non-Malay Bumiputeras could also lead the country.

"The process in this direction had already begun. Believe me, if we are sensitive towards the needs of the Malaysian people, the issue of race and descent will no longer prevent any Malaysian from holding any post," he said when opening the 47th MCA general assembly today.

Also present were Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Gerakan president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik and representatives of other Barisan Nasional component parties.

He said the Federal Constitution did not specify that the Prime Minister must be of any particular race.

"Malaysians can achieve this by their own methods. Work together in politics, the economy and society, and we can end racism and accept any Malaysian as Prime Minister or for other posts," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia belonged to all Malaysians and in the 42 years since independence, the races had become so close and integrated that sometimes it was even difficult to identify a Malaysian by race.

He urged the Chinese community to forge a genuine working relationship with other races especially the Bumiputeras for a more prosperous Malaysia.

"It will be good if the Chinese and Bumiputeras form genuine partnerships where the Bumiputeras play a meaningful role, through which they can gain experience and skills.

"The Ali Baba partnership where the Bumiputera is only the 'front' will not help in the transfer of expertise in business."

He said the Chinese would not lose out if the Bumiputeras became better traders, adding that the Chinese everywhere were very adept businessmen.

If they shared their skills, the Bumiputeras would become wealthier and form a better market for Chinese traders, he said.

He added that Malaysia had always believed in the concept of "prosperity neighbour".

"During the economic crisis, the Bumiputeras' fragile achievements had eroded badly. We have to work together to revive the Bumiputera economy so as to achieve the National Development Policy's goals," he said.

Speaking to reporters later about his views on a non-Malay Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir said it was important for Barisan Nasional to work towards this and not emphasise the differences between the races. People should instead emphasise the similarities.

It was up to the people when this could be achieved, he said.

On Umno's views of this, he said he thought that Umno could accept it as the party wanted leaders who were dedicated to the country.

"Of course, it will take time, there will be some Umno members who will find this difficult to accept.

"I am not trying to do something which will cause Umno members to increase their dislike for me, but I am just stating the facts," he said.

Asked if the non-Malays would get more Cabinet posts, Dr Mahathir said that had to be looked into, but felt that it might one day be possible for

people to no longer identify themselves by race.

He said the people would retain their characteristics and culture, but consider themselves Malaysians.

He said it was not for him to say if there would no longer be race-based political parties in the future as that depended on the future generation.

Asked if the New Economic Policy and National Development Policy had created a racial divide, he said they had, in fact, helped to integrate the races.

On the rift between MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik and deputy Datuk Lim Ah Lek, Dr Mahathir said it was a small internal matter and the two were mature enough to settle it.

"They don't need my interference."

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