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Political parties need to practise tolerance for unity, says Dr M

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Political parties representing various races in the country need to practise tolerance to ensure unity and understanding prevail among the people, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

Emphasising that Malaysia's success depended on the spirit of tolerance among the people, the Prime Minister said although the parties had to grapple with various political and social issues, their bigger responsibility was to ensure that the country remained peaceful and stable.

Such a climate would allow the people to continue enjoying prosperity and development.

When dealing with issues, Dr Mahathir said extremism should be discarded as it could destroy the progress attained so far.

"We should together discuss (problems) and try to find amicable solutions.

"Perhaps we will not be able to resolve all of them but we can at least arrive at some point of agreement," he said when opening the People's Progressive Party's 47th annual general meeting.

He also launched the party's new logo which depicts a five-pointed multi-coloured star. The old logo was a six-pointed blue star.

Dr Mahathir, who is Barisan Nasional chairman, said there were channels to discuss matters related to race or religion.

"While we should not refrain from raising issues that we feel are not fair to us, they should not be exposed openly as it may infuriate other people."

Unity in Malaysia, said Dr Mahathir, did not come naturally but through the wishes of the people wanting to live together in peace.

"We can be a model of how a society of different races, religions, cultures and languages can live in peace.

"We must nurture the willingness to sacrifice and the spirit of unity among the people as they are the factors behind our success."

It was this spirit of tolerance and co-operation that had helped the BN, a coalition of 14 parties, to be successful.

Dr Mahathir said it was not easy to maintain harmony and understanding as achieved by the BN. "There must be wisdom and compromise in dealing with problems facing each party representing the various races."

Responding to PPP president Datuk M. Kayveas' speech earlier where he made known the party's intention of "reclaiming" parliamentary and State seats allotted to it many years ago, Dr Mahathir said the request would be considered.

As the party had played its role in ensuring the success of BN in the last general election, he said it was only fair that the request be looked into.

"We realise that PPP worked hard during the general election and by-elections, and BN appreciates this," he said to laud applause from delegates.

Kayveas said as a party committed to the coalition's struggle, it had a right to contest the seats again.

Later at a Press conference, when asked whether it would be a delicate task to fulfil the PPP's request, Dr Mahathir said it was something that he could not decide on his own.

On whether other component parties would be happy as giving PPP the

seats it wanted would mean taking away seats allocated to them, Dr Mahathir replied: "We always aim high."

On the possibility of more seats being created, Dr Mahathir said the Government would not conduct a delineation exercise just for the purpose of having more seats for parties in the BN.

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