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Sabah BN leaders `more open-minded now'

KOTA KINABALU, Thurs. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said sentiments of parochialism no longer existed among leaders of Sabah-based Barisan Nasional component parties.

The Prime Minister said State BN party leaders were now more open-minded and fully subscribed to the objectives and aspirations of the coalition.

"BN component members in Sabah are no longer contesting in elections using their own party symbols.

"All contested using the BN symbol," he said when opening the United Pasok Momogun Kadazandusun Organisation's sixth congress at Dewan Maksak here today.

He said in the past BN component parties in Sabah insisted on using their own symbols on grounds that the respective parties would not be supported by members if they contested under the BN banner.

Dr Mahathir said the people were fully backing the BN Government as could be seen in the State and parliamentary elections last year.

The Sabah-based BN parties are UPKO, Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah, Sabah Progressive Party, Angkatan Keadilan Rakyat and the Liberal Democratic Party. Umno, MCA, Gerakan and MIC had also spread their wings to Sabah.

The Prime Minister said there were 14 parties in BN representing all the races, all having the same number of representatives in the national BN committee.

"Some quarters said having too many parties was not good but this kind of coalition is the best for the country. Such co-operation cannot be found elsewhere in the world," he said.

He said it was still not the time for Malaysia to have a one-party Government.

Dr Mahathir was happy to note that the slogan "Sabah for Sabahans" was no longer heard in the State and this augured well for its political stability.

This slogan was popularised by Parti Bersatu Sabah during its term as the State Government (1985-1994).

"It will not be nice if people say `Kedah for Dr Mahathir only'. The people of Malaysia are welcomed and respected where ever they go in the country like that accorded to me here today," he said.

On UPKO, the Prime Minister said the party was supported not only by the Kadazandusun and Murut but also other races, including the Muslim Bumiputera community.

"I am happy to note that even though this is UPKO's congress, there was a doa recited by a Muslim," he said.

The doa was recited by Awang Damit Othman, one of the two UPKO supreme council members.

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