

07/07/2001

Barisan leaders to provide directions

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Barisan Nasional component party leaders are expected to offer productive and constructive ideas to consolidate the coalition at the BN convention at the Putra World Trade Centre tomorrow.

BN chairman Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is also the Prime Minister, will deliver the keynote address in which he is expected to remind the leaders on the need for BN to sincerely serve the people.

This is the second time since 1995 that the BN is holding such a convention. It was the first convention held after 21 years of the BN's inception. It was held then to determine the future course of its 14 component parties. BN secretary-general Tan Sri Mohamed Rahmat told the New Straits Times today that the convention this year was a "very good platform" for the so-called silent majority to forward their views for the betterment of the coalition.

He said that Dr Mahathir is expected to spell out in detail the main challenge for the BN.

"Our main agenda now is to attract the younger generation of Malaysians ... the generation which feels that they are Malaysians and not merely Malays, Indians or Chinese," Mohamed said.

Mohamed added all BN component parties and their members must think, feel and act as a single entity with a national obligation of serving the people.

He said that they must also double their efforts to better explain the spirit to the younger generation so that the future leaders of the nation could learn to respect BN's struggle.

He felt that apart from the need to re-consolidate, component party leaders and members must gradually strive to do away with communal politics.

Met at the Putra World Trade Centre while monitoring preparations for the opening ceremony scheduled to begin at 9am tomorrow, Mohamed said he expected BN members to turn the event into something positive for the coalition.

He said that although it was not very healthy for the coalition, balancing communal rights among component members was still a problem which must be addressed collectively.

"We are an old and strong family, but the basic core values must be enhanced from time to time so the younger generation would understand what we are and where we're heading, otherwise we will have problems," he said.

After Dr Mahathir's keynote address during the opening ceremony, all 13 component party leaders are expected to debate the chairman's speech and also forward their views pertaining to the continued lead role of the BN.

As in the just-concluded Umno general assembly, the main call is expected to be for members to unite and strive for a common goal rather than fighting for individual benefits.

"We are not a party that mushrooms only during the general election and then disappears into thin air."

He reiterated that the BN convention was not because the coalition was weak, but more because it was the most appropriate forum for BN members to share their views and thoughts.

"Complacency is creeping in ... and we must be united to address this weakness, it is by itself a big challenge," Mohamed said, adding that it was more of the attitude of BN members than the strength of the opposition

that he feared.

"From my years of experience, both in Umno and Government, I'm very sure that the BN cannot be defeated when all its members are united."