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## Barisan convention on Saturday

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Barisan Nasional will hold its annual convention on Saturday, which is expected to draw the attendance of some 5,000 participants.

Themed "Barisan Nasional as the Pillar of the Country's Integrity" (Barisan Nasional Tunggak Keutuhan Negara), the one-day convention will be held at the Putra World Trade Centre.

BN chairman Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will deliver the keynote address.

Each of the 13 component party presidents of the coalition will then respond to the address.

Umno deputy president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi will respond to Dr Mahathir's keynote address on behalf of Umno.

BN secretary-general Tan Sri Mohamed Rahmat, who announced this at a Press conference at the Putra World Trade Centre today, said the theme was chosen as a reminder of how the Perikatan (Alliance) and subsequent BN had played an important role in effectively ruling the country.

"Whether or not the BN will remain as a pillar of the country is a question which the convention participants will be dealing with," he said.

Mohamed was asked by a foreign journalist whether the BN convention was being held to counter the allegedly growing influence of the opposition.

"I would rebut that ... we don't fear the opposition.

"They have been unsuccessful in trying to unseat us over the years because they are not standing on common ground and they are divided.

"The BN, however, is a united front and component parties are committed to the ideals of the coalition, so to say that we are holding this convention because we are scared of the opposition is nonsense," he said.

Mohamed also clarified by saying that BN conventions were a routine affair.

He said under Article 24 of the BN constitution, the coalition was required to hold annual conventions.

Furthermore, although the last BN convention was held in 1995, subsequent years saw BN celebrations or other events being held in place of conventions.

Mohamed said the convention would also see the launching of a book on the BN. Entitled "Balancing Communal Rights", the book, which is a limited edition, will be launched in "coffee-table" edition, paperback and Video Compact Disc (VCD).

Mohamed said the book, produced by the BN headquarters, will initially not be made available to the public. However, it might subsequently be sold openly to recoup costs if the situation warrants.

Elaborating on the contents of the book, Mohamed said the question of balancing communal rights would become a main responsibility of BN in the near future.

This was because imbalances among races were appearing due to the effects of the 1997 economic downturn, globalisation and the digital era.

Citing an example, Mohamed said much of what the BN had achieved in alleviating the economic imbalance among the races was reversed following the economic downturn.

He said those who failed to master Information Technology will be left behind, and this would have serious implications on efforts to correct the imbalance.

Mohamed said all convention proceedings would be open to the accredited Press for coverage.

Mohamed said he had received information that unspecified parties were illegally collecting donations in Johor Baru and the Klang Valley, supposedly to fund a BN luncheon and publication of a book on the coalition.

He said the BN secretariat had never sought any donation for the purpose and warned the public to be wary of such unscrupulous parties.

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