

31 MAR 2001

Mahathir-BN

BN TO CONCENTRATE ON THE POOR

KUALA LUMPUR, March 31 (Bernama) -- The Barisan Nasional (BN) will devote more attention to the poor in the urban and rural areas through closer ties between its elected representatives and the society, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

Dr Mahathir, who is also the BN chairman, said BN elected representatives must go down to the field more often to see for themselves the problems faced by the people, including squatters, to resolve them.

"The move to get closer to the people must be stepped up because we often concentrate on our own constituencies only while others do not get attention," he told reporters after chairing the BN supreme council, here.

The country was recently jolted by the clashes among the residents of several villages along Jalan Klang Lama which resulted in six deaths. Some parties have linked the clashes to the poor living conditions of the locals who are mostly squatters.

Dr Mahathir said: "We must go down to the field, that is, we must see for ourselves. Although we hear about squatters and we know the problems of squatters, sometimes we don't go and see. We will only know (the true situation) if we go and see," he said.

He said the meeting, which lasted more than two hours, also wanted the BN to act more as a 'party' with its component members facing the problems and challenges together without prioritising their respective parties.

He said: "So far, the BN seems to be acting through the different component parties, acting on their own except during the elections when we determine who should stand for which constituency and then we back those candidates.

"But now, what we want to do is that if there is any problem, we will look at it from the BN angle which means that we'll have to have a common stand on most issues...so that we can approach the issues and solve them as BN problems, not as a single party's problems, not individually."

Towards this end, more meetings of the BN supreme council would be held, he said.

To a question, he said there would always be some members who would not agree with the BN's decisions.

He cited the example of Umno where some of its members may not agree with the decisions of the Umno leadership.

However, Dr Mahathir said, it was up to the respective BN leaders to convince their party members to accept whatever decision reached by the BN leadership.

On another note, he said the BN was planning to set up its own headquarters in Kuala Lumpur to enable it to function more efficiently.

It now has an office at the Umno headquarters building at the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC), here.

Dr Mahathir also said the BN would hold its convention, themed "BN Tonggak Keutuhan Negara", at the PWTC on July 7 this year.

Some 3,000 party members are expected to attend.

-- BERNAMA

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