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Dr M: BN should be a party

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the party's supreme council has agreed that the Barisan Nasional should be a party and not a coalition of component parties as at present.

"During our meeting we discussed the suggestion. The council agrees with the new role and structure of the BN," he said after chairing the Umno supreme council meeting today.

Earlier, after chairing a BN supreme council meeting at Menara Dato' Onn, Dr Mahathir said BN would adopt a more collective approach in addressing issues facing the country, with greater emphasis on solving problems affecting the poor.

The Prime Minister and BN chairman said this called for the BN to function more as a party instead of a coalition.

He said measures to provide for the people's needs, especially the lower-income group in urban and rural areas, would be intensified.

"Ties between BN wakil rakyat and the people will be enhanced through, for instance, more visits to understand the problems and to solve them," he said.

He said the emphasis did not mean the Government had neglected the welfare of the people before, but there was a need for efforts to be intensified.

"Sometimes, we give attention to our areas only and there are quarters which did not receive attention. That's why we need to turun padang to see for ourselves the situation. For example, we know there are squatters but until we go and see their problems, we would not know."

Dr Mahathir said coalition members agreed on the need to face challenges together and not to place the interests of each party above those of the BN. He said except during elections, the component parties seemed to be acting on their own.

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

On the attempt to stop the swearing-in of Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Chong Kah Kiat, Dr Mahathir said the majority accepted the rotation system.

He said the coalition partners, including Umno, would take action against their members if they were found to be involved.

On differences among Sabah BN parties, Dr Mahathir said it was normal for some quarters to be unhappy with the decisions made.

"There will always be some who will disagree. Even in parties like Umno, there are those who oppose some of its decisions.

"(But in BN) what's important is to have an agreement among members who have their representatives in the coalition. They speak as one and agree to what has been decided and it is up to the parties to convince their members."

To enhance its cohesiveness, Dr Mahathir said the 14-member coalition would hold more meetings, besides setting up its headquarters in Kuala Lumpur.

He added that a BN convention themed "BN the Pillars of the Country's Stability" would be held on July 7 at the Putra World Trade Centre.

About 3,000 delegates from the component parties representing all levels

are expected to attend.

Dr Mahathir said the meeting today also touched on globalisation and how it would affect the country.

He said Malaysia would hold firmly to its independence and reiterated that those who benefited from globalisation must have a moral obligation to contribute some of their wealth towards helping the poor.

"That is why we have proposed that rich countries be taxed so as to distribute their wealth which will be used to build needed infrastructure in poor countries."

He said doing business freely without obstruction or borders would only benefit those who had money.

"Like the kacang putih seller here ... he will not be able to expand to have branches in the United States and Europe."

Dr Mahathir also said his recent meeting with representatives from the Chinese business community touched on various problems faced by the community.

"We discussed things such as how to facilitate business and the co-operation between the Chinese and Bumiputeras ... I will be receiving a memorandum later so that we can consider what to do."

Met by reporters, MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik said the coalition's new approach was a right direction towards fostering greater interaction among the people.

"We have identified the problems and now must work together on a common agenda to resolve them."

Asked about Parti Keadilan Nasional's action in seeking outside help to free former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Dr Ling said outsiders should not be involved in the country's internal affairs.

"There is no need to meddle in our affairs as we are capable of running the country ourselves."