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Dr M: BN will continue to rule

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is confident the Barisan Nasional will continue to rule the country in the years to come.

"I am confident that the BN will continue to prosper and lead the Malaysian Government in the years to come," Dr Mahathir, who is also BN chairman, said after the BN convention.

The Prime Minister said the BN would set up a secretariat and an information centre to enable the people to keep abreast of its development.

Expressing satisfaction with the commitment and unity shown by all BN component party leaders and members in this year's convention, Dr Mahathir said the spirit of BN was clearly strong.

"All quarters stressed the importance of closing ranks and enhancing co-operation. In this respect, regular meetings should be held at all branches as well as the divisions."

He reiterated that the BN has been an effective mechanism and channel to solve racial problems.

"If there are any racial misunderstandings, the matter can be forwarded via BN or the Government. We will look into the grievances faced by all races."

But the Prime Minister said that if there was a pressing need for the formation of an independent body, the BN would look into it.

On his proposal for the formation of Bangsa Malaysia, the Prime Minister said he brought it up at the 1995 convention but the message was not clear.

"However, these days, so many are showing the spirit of Bangsa Malaysia. Although we are not from one race, our commitment towards the country is high and undivided. This is against the opposition parties who do not have such commitment as they always seek assistance from foreigners."

Dr Mahathir stressed the importance of the people to regard themselves as one race - Bangsa Malaysia. "It is not a question of different descent or race. The Malaysians are from one race (rakyat Malaysia dari bangsa yang sama)."

Asked when he expected the Bangsa Malaysia vision to be realised, he said it could take a long time, "perhaps 10 years, 20 years".

On the proposal for the formation of a one-party coalition, he said the BN is working towards it.

"We believe in gradualism, not something revolutionary and forcing people to accept what they are not ready to accept."

Dr Mahathir also said the BN wants to attract the younger generation but this could only be done "if we get closer to the people".

Asked on religious extremism in the country, he said the problem could be addressed if the people understood the problem and stand united to fight against such extremism.

He added that those extremists actually do not uphold the religious beliefs but instead clearly went against the teaching of the religion.

"Islam does not teach us to become extremists."

The Prime Minister who was pressed on the appointment of the Finance Minister said that he had reliable people assisting him in his capacity as the Finance Minister.

"Well I have two deputies, a secretary-general (of the ministry), Governor of the Central Bank, two advisers (Tan Sri Ali Abul Hassan

Sulaiman and Tan Sri Nor Mohamed Yackop ... I have lots of people working for me," he said.

Further questioned if he would pick any one of them to be the next Finance Minister, Dr Mahathir quipped: "I don't know. Maybe the secretary-general could become the next Prime Minister. In this country you are free to speculate ... it is a free world."

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