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`No defection can shake BN'

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - The Barisan Nasional Government will not lose its majority if any of the component parties decides to pull out from the coalition, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The BN would continue to be the Government and parties which chose to pull out would be in the opposition without any power.

Even if Umno tried to pull out of the coalition, the party would not be able to form the Government, he said.

For this reason, Dr Mahathir said, component parties in the BN rarely threatened to pull out as the coalition's majority was large.

There was no risk of Barisan Nasional losing power if any of the component parties backed out.

"Coalition members from the parties that represent the various races guarantee that all races will get the same treatment from BN. This is the BN secret, the secret that makes us strong and has resulted in many others wanting to join us while the opposition tries to imitate us," Dr Mahathir, who is BN chairman, said when opening the People's Progressive Party's 48th annual general assembly at the Putra World Trade Centre.

The opposition, he said, had made two attempts to imitate the BN and formed an alternative opposition front.

"The first attempt has failed and now we can see that the second attempt is already cracking. Look at how Pas cheated DAP, Parti Keadilan Nasional and PRM.

"Keadilan had a `very interesting' issue and Pas manipulated the issue to its advantage while DAP suffered tremendously because of its ties with Pas."

Dr Mahathir said the Chinese support for the DAP eroded until the party's heavyweights were rejected by the people in the 1999 general election.

"Realising this, the DAP tried to break ties with Pas but it came a bit too late. DAP's recent proposal to work with Keadilan will not clear their tainted image," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the opposition should take a clear stand so that the people could judge them.

Taking a swipe at Keadilan, Dr Mahathir said he congratulated the party for claiming that it was not a Malay party.

"This will certainly benefit them as they will no longer be responsible to defend and protect the rights of the Malays.

"Umno certainly do not need support from an opportunist to defend the rights of the Malays," he added.

The Prime Minister said the Government expected to have a more credible and responsible opposition to provide the check and balance, but at present it seemed intent only on slander and sowing hatred against the Government and its leaders.

The country, Dr Mahathir said, would be more peaceful and could concentrate on working for balanced development among the races if problems created by the opposition were absent.

He said Malaysia was a democratic country that had gone through 10 elections since independence and where opposition parties could win if they had the support.

"The situation in Malaysia is not like in other countries where opposition candidates who win the election are not allowed to take their

place in Parliament and some are even dragged to court," he said, adding that Malaysians had, however, always voted for the coalition since independence.

"This has enabled us to implement long-term policies continuously for the benefit of the people."

Dr Mahathir reminded the people that the country had established a unique co-operation among the various ethnic groups.

"Our belief in the system of power sharing among the races and parties should be retained no matter what the challenges that lie ahead. All the component parties should realise that they must be prepared to sacrifice some of their interests to enable common interests to be achieved."

Self-interest should not be allowed to supersede party interests as the coalition's success was of utmost importance to all.

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