

08/07/2001

New approach needed (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - The Barisan Nasional can no longer rely on its past achievements to ensure the people's continued support but must prove its capability in bringing further progress to the country.

Chairman Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said this could be done through hard work, dedication and unity.

The Prime Minister said the coalition needed to adopt a new approach to deal with a changing society, especially the younger generation.

"We cannot rely on our past achievements to convince them that we are the party that should be selected to continue running the country. On the contrary, we need to prove to them our ability, strength and capability," he said when addressing 3,000 delegates to the BN Convention today.

The Prime Minister said Malaysia had set its goal under Vision 2020 to become a developed nation.

"We must ensure that this vision is achieved because other parties, especially the imitation Barisan (Barisan Alternatif of the Opposition), would not be able to achieve it. The only party that can realise Vision 2020 is the Barisan Nasional."

To realise this, Dr Mahathir reminded BN leaders on the importance of enhancing co-operation among themselves, solving problems together and ensuring that the 13-member BN functioned as a party rather than a coalition.

"This is the approach to be taken as society has changed. People no longer feel indebted to the independence fighters and the Government which have developed the country, enabling them to enjoy a better life compared to countries which achieved independence at the same time as us," he said.

Emphasising the need to take into account the current reality, Dr Mahathir said society now was more "brutal and hostile", one which no longer placed priority on national interests.

"There are even those who are willing to become supporters and puppets of foreigners. That's why, whenever faced with problems, they scurry to foreigners for support. They do not have any more love and patriotism for the country. What they are concerned about is the possibility of wresting power."

Dr Mahathir said the BN supreme council would come up with guidelines on the role to be played by leaders of component parties.

The Prime Minister expressed confidence that, eventually, BN would evolve into a single party.

"This will take time because it is not easy to eradicate suspicion among the races and to uplift the economy of every race.

"But this is our goal, one that started with the formation of Parti Perikatan and BN. Now BN has to work more closely, understand each other better and resolve problems together."

Dr Mahathir said BN representatives must give equal attention to problems of all races and not confine to those of their own.

He suggested that BN meetings at all levels be held more regularly. At State level, it should be held at least biennially and, if possible, four times yearly as such meetings could help enhance co-operation.

Dr Mahathir said closer co-operation would result in a much stronger and united coalition in facing present challenges.

"I am confident that with a united BN, we can say goodbye to the imitation Barisan in the next general election."

In a speech tracing the events leading to the formation of Parti Perikatan after the country's independence, which was later replaced by BN, Dr Mahathir said the co-operation of all races and its power-sharing formula had ensured Malaysia's rapid development.

The country's post-independence leaders inherited a poor country from the British but their foresight and commitment had transformed Malaysia into what it was today.

The country was now recognised as the most developed among the developing countries, with adequate facilities provided for its people at all levels.

One yardstick that can be used was the per capita income which rose from only US\$300 after independence to US\$4,000 now. It now produces its own national car while its national oil corporation has extensive business interest worldwide and has gained a place as one of the 500 biggest companies in the world.

He said many foreign leaders were impressed with BN's success, especially how 13 race-based parties could work together without any bickering.

They regarded Malaysia as already having achieved developed nation status.

"BN is a unique coalition in the world. It is one invention of Malaysia that should be registered," he said to applause from delegates.

Unlike BN, he said, two or three-party coalitions were not secured as governments could easily collapse if one party were to withdraw its support.

The fact that the Opposition, despite their opposing ideologies and objectives, had formed its own coalition showed they recognised the effectiveness of BN, but Dr Mahathir said as with other "imitation goods", it failed to match the original product.

"The genuine Barisan is BN. The Opposition cannot match this as they are not sincere with each other; they want to cheat each other.

"For example, Pas told its supporters of its aim to set up an Islamic state but to DAP and the Chinese, they admitted it would not be like Iran or Taliban (in Afghanistan) because Malaysia is a multi-racial country."