

20/05/2001

OPP will help Indians, says PM

nam Visvanathan; James Kandiah; Carol Murugiah

JOHOR BARU, Sat. - The Government, not wanting to see Malaysians divided along economic and social lines, has formulated policies like the Outline Perspective Plan which will provide redress for specific problems among Indians and others, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said Indians would be given special consideration under the OPP and the Eighth Malaysia Plan to improve their lot.

"I hope Indians will accept these plans positively as they represent the best possible opportunity for them to improve their lives in the near term," he said when opening the 55th MIC annual general assembly at the Eden Garden Hotel here this morning.

Also present were MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, Gerakan president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik, Peoples Progressive Party president Datuk M. Kayveas and Umno secretary-general Datuk Khalil Yaacob.

Dr Mahathir said the Barisan Nasional Government was committed to improving the living standards of all, irrespective of race.

"We realise the effort to bring development and progress to the people cannot be delayed.

"We need specific programmes to take our people who are marginalised out of their difficulty.

"They have, at the same time, to change their style or culture of life which is redundant to suit the times."

Dr Mahathir, pointing out that all quarters needed to be proactive, honest and determined about carrying out government policies, said the best plans could go awry because of poor implementation. Large allocations would be useless if not utilised as planned.

Explaining the need for all-round and fair economic and social improvement, he said any imbalance would see problems between the various communities.

"We have experienced this before. It almost plunged our nation in the direction of destruction and devastation as a result of racial conflict arising out of an imbalance in the distribution of national wealth.

"This is what the Government wants to prevent from recurring any time in future."

Dr Mahathir said the Government was not being partial to a specific community if it was seen to be giving special attention to it.

It also did not mean that the Government was "treating them like step-children" or cutting them off from official sources of assistance.

"If it seems that the Government is only helping a specific community, it is because the community needs help from the authorities.

"I hope all communities will understand this situation as it is important in ensuring peace and development in the country for the future."

The Prime Minister said just like the Malays and Chinese, there were pockets of poverty among Indians who were divorced from the mainstream of development.

He said these pockets were in both urban and rural areas, especially in squatter settlements.

"Low incomes and unsteady circumstances of some sections of the population have led to some of the social problems in Malaysian society today."

Lauding the MIC's effort to alleviate the woes of Indians, he said the

party and Samy Vellu were constantly striving to improve the livelihood and wages of poorer sections of the community in estates and the manufacturing sector.

On the MIC, he said, it was still strong and united under Samy Vellu's leadership which had seen the party working also in the interest of other communities.

"The MIC is still popular and is receiving the support of a majority of Malaysian Indians. It is still a large umbrella which protects the rights and interests of Indians. The MIC also protects the interests of other communities through its support for the Barisan Nasional."

On the MIC's decision to convene the annual general assembly here, he said other Barisan Nasional component parties, including Umno, could do likewise.

"It will give those in the States an opportunity to see leaders who normally only appear on television or are quoted by the media.

"This could give members at the State level a sense of oneness with the national leadership," he said, adding that the cost of holding such meetings could be higher than normal.

(END)