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`Malays must step up efforts'

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BUKIT MERTAJAM, Fri. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said the Malays must step up their efforts to improve their lot as they are still lagging behind the non-Malays.

The Malays have yet to achieve the 30 per cent target under the New Economic Policy, the Prime Minister said, and that they needed to overcome poverty among some members of the community.

"We have achieved a lot in our struggles for the nation.

"Our struggles for Islam are still being manipulated by the Opposition, and our economic achievement is still unsatisfactory," he said at Politeknik Seberang Perai here, at the end of his two-day visit to Penang.

Dr Mahathir, who is Umno president, was asked on what Umno leaders and members, specifically in Permatang Pauh, must do for the Malays.

Although he was satisfied with his visit to Penang, he said, there was still much to be done for the Malays.

Asked on the support from the people of Permatang Pauh, one of the areas he visited, for Barisan Nasional and Umno, Dr Mahathir said: "The enthusiasm is there and they are now much more committed."

"I am confident that their attitude has changed since the 1999 general election."

According to Dr Mahathir, the people's warm reception and their encouraging attendance showed their attitude had changed positively since they had understood the actual situation.

"I find there is still interest to continue with the struggles of the Barisan Nasional and Umno.

"I am confident this is a good sign for the future of Umno and the BN," he said.

Asked for his advice to Permatang Pauh Umno division leaders and members, he said they should put behind all differences during the recent Umno divisional elections and to concentrate on Umno's struggles.

What was imperative, he said, was to achieve Umno's struggle for the race, religion and nation.

As part of his itinerary, the Prime Minister met with about 2,000 State Barisan Nasional leaders in Bayan Baru last night.

At 10am today, he held a closed-door meeting with leaders of Bayan Baru and Balik Pulau Umno divisions before attending a luncheon with about 2,000 people at the Balik Pulau Sports Complex.

Later today, he held another dialogue session with leaders of Bukit Mertajam and Permatang Pauh Umno divisions at Politeknik Seberang Perai.

Preceding his second dialogue, Dr Mahathir launched the Kampung Pertama Umno Youth branch operations centre. It is located under the Permatang Pauh Parliamentary constituency.

At the launching, the Umno president also received 291 applications to join Umno.

Accompanying the Prime Minister were his wife, Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, deputy Umno president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon and their wives.