

Barisan's interests come first, says Dr M

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KUALA LUMPUR: Any leader in the Barisan Nasional, no matter how important he thinks he is, cannot be bigger than what the coalition party stands for, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

"No single person is the winner. The winner must be the party and the party will only win if we put its interests ahead of any one leader within the party," the Prime Minister said.

As such, he added, the strength of any component party in the Barisan must be maintained and protected from becoming weak because of internal strife.

Any misunderstanding within the party must be tackled with the spirit of give and take, he said when opening the 49th MCA general assembly at Wisma MCA yesterday.

Dr Mahathir said the Barisan must be strong to maintain racial harmony among the different races in the country.

If any leader was weak or there was internal bickering, there would be a tendency for some to go to extremes to gain support.

"When this happens in one party, it will result in other component parties going the same way.

"In the end, Barisan will be weakened and the opposition will win by default," he said.

Dr Mahathir, who is Umno president and Barisan chairman, said the people needed a strong government to tackle the various racial problems affecting the country.

Referring to the Chinese community; he said it would have to depend on the component parties in the Barisan which represented its interest.

It was the same, he said, with

the Malays whose future was tied to the strength of Umno.

Dr Mahathir said an effective alliance like the Barisan could only be effective if its components were strong and moderate.

"If we bicker among ourselves, either within our party or with other component parties, the harmony that we see today will be lost.

"Then we will be just like many other developing countries which are unstable, undeveloped and unsafe," he added.

Dr Mahathir advised the MCA to support the transition of power in the country by giving its backing to Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi who would take over from him as Prime Minister.

Although there is nothing about it written in the constitution, there is a tradition which has been followed to ensure smooth transition of leadership in the country.

"This is a tradition that has enabled us to effect changes smoothly in the leadership of the Government. This is important for stability and prosperity.

"It is a tradition also that the president of Umno, the biggest party in Barisan, chairs the coalition. As head of the coalition, he becomes head of the biggest party in Parliament.

"As such, he will become the Prime Minister and he will have the right to nominate members of his Cabinet.

"Although this is his right, he must also follow tradition in the appointment of Cabinet members so that all the component parties representing all the races will be represented," he said.