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Stand up against extremism (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Barisan Nasional component parties should be united in fighting racial and religious extremism that can be expected to be a feature of many groups in the future, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister and BN chairman said they should not be apologetic but stand up for the larger interests of the community and nation. "The challenges we will face are pressure from religious and racial extremism, political fanaticism and racial chauvinism in every group within our society.

"These extremist groups pose a great threat to society and if they are not opposed and stopped, they might incite racial and religious riots when they cannot get what they want. These factions are near-sighted and narrow-minded.

"Hence, I call on all BN component parties to act more courageously and be united as one in fighting for the BN objectives of promoting a united, peaceful, safe, progressive and prosperous Malaysian society," he said.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president, was speaking at the Gerakan's 31st national delegates' conference.

Stressing that the future depended on tolerance, harmony and mutual respect among Malaysians of various races, languages, cultures and religions, he said BN component parties should be brave in facing extremist groups and not feel threatened or afraid of losing their popularity or influence within their own communities.

The Prime Minister reiterated that component parties should stand firmly behind the BN because the Government had the mandate.

"Component parties should realise that extremist factions are part of our society. They (extremists) do not have wide support from society; we also know that generally, society does not like violence or extremist actions by any party," he said.

He added that although BN components were race-based, they acted in the interest of the people and nation. He said all BN decisions were made through consensus and not at the whim or fancy of any single party in the coalition.

"We should also remember that any decision by the BN Government is not the decision of just one component party. It's not true that only one party makes the decision and the rest just follow blindly," he said.

Dr Mahathir also advised component parties against fears that they were solely responsible for any government decision, saying that they should also not worry about a probable backlash from the people, especially the community that they represented.

"We must remember that when action is taken by the BN Government, we are actually representing the BN and not ourselves," he said.

Also present were Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Gerakan president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik and other BN component party leaders.

At a Press conference later, Dr Mahathir said that at times, BN component parties felt threatened that their own community might not support them when dealing with sensitive issues.

"But all decisions made (by BN) are reached by consensus. If and when we can't reach a consensus, we often postpone the decision until there is a consensus.

"So once a consensus is reached then everyone is duty-bound to support it... we may lose some support but it does not matter because the most important thing is that we take the middle path. Everybody has to sacrifice in the interest of Malaysia and Malaysians," he said.

Asked if the Government's proposal to teach Mathematics and Science in English was still being opposed by certain component parties, Dr Mahathir said no one opposed the idea.

"There is no opposition. The question is how we are going to implement the idea. How it is going to be done is a matter which we have not decided yet.

"It's all right. We don't have to quarrel (over that). It's not a problem for the BN. We can solve it through consensus," Dr Mahathir said.