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Join BN, PM to Opposition (HL)

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PENANG, Sat. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today issued an open invitation to Opposition parties to join the Barisan Nasional since it practised an open policy and was willing to share power.

"This invitation is open to all parties. We are not power hungry, that's why we are willing to share power with other parties, and more and more of them are joining the BN with Parti Bersatu Sabah being accepted back into the fold recently," he said.

The Prime Minister said everyone needed to work with the Government to face threats from external enemies.

"Let us reduce the politicking and focus on developing our country because we have enemies outside the country. That is why we must be united to fight them," he told reporters after opening the State BN convention in Balik Pulau here.

He said the BN had accepted many of its foes, including Gerakan and Pas, after the 1969 general election.

Dr Mahathir, who is also BN chairman, was asked to elaborate on his call to Parti Keadilan Nasional members to join BN parties, including Umno, so as to continue contributing their efforts in developing the country.

In his speech, he said: "It's better for Keadilan to be dissolved and rejoin Umno. We are prepared to accept them just as we had accepted members of the Parti Semangat 46."

He said Keadilan, together with the DAP and Pas through the Barisan Alternatif coalition, had no chance of assuming power because ties between them were crumbling.

He said DAP and Pas were fighting over the issue of setting up an Islamic state and there was no longer cooperation between them.

However, he said, if Keadilan members wished to return to Umno, their intention must be sincere. They must work with the BN Government to develop the country and not for their own objectives.

About 5,000 BN members attended the convention themed Barisan Nasional Leads: Penang continues to Progress.

Present were Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, State BN chairman and Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon, Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Dr Hilmi Yahaya and leaders of State BN component parties.

The Prime Minister said the power-sharing concept adopted by the BN enabled component parties to have their respective representatives in the Government to discuss solutions to problems faced by the country and to find a formula for national development.

He also paid tribute to the late Tengku Abdul Rahman for being able to unite the nation then, although the people was from different races and religious beliefs.

Asked to comment on statements by several quarters urging him to contest the next general election, Dr Mahathir said he was firm in his decision not to seek reelection as an MP. He said he had made up his mind and would stick by it.

"I cannot be wavering on this ... I have said something and that's it. I had wanted to quit, but was asked to remain. I don't want the people to say that I am playing politics. No! I have made up my mind to resign."

Asked about the tactics of the Opposition in conducting en bloc registration of imported and phantom voters, he said it could have been done for more than 30 years already.

"It is one of the Opposition's biggest deception aimed at ensuring their supporters vote for them in areas they had lost marginally, as well as an attempt to deny the people from continuing to vote for the BN," he said.

Citing an example, he said Dr Hilmi's parents' names on the electoral register had been transferred elsewhere without their knowledge.

Dr Mahathir said about 2,000 voters in his constituency in Kedah, one of the States where such practices are rampant, had also gone missing.

He did not rule out that the Opposition was getting assistance from within the Election Commission.