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Mahathir-Unity

NEED FOR MORE RUKUN TETANGGA SECTORS, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 26 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has suggested that more rukun tetangga (neighbourhood watch) sectors be set up, especially in areas with high risks of conflict in the community.

He said rukun tetangga, which is among social institutions playing an important role in promoting unity, should widen its services so that it can produce a harmonious and prosperous society.

"Rukun tetangga also serves to monitor and resolve issues at the grassroots level before they worsen and spread," he said at the Mega Unity Gathering 2002 at the National Stadium in Bukit Jalil here tonight.

The ceremony, organised for the first time by the National Unity and Social Development Ministry, was officiated at by Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin Syed Putra Jamalullai.

Dr Mahathir said the government would continue to give strong support to rukun tetangga, which comes under the ministry, apart from extending more aid to it to make a success of its community programmes and activities.

Dr Mahathir said as the current economic conditions were not too encouraging, the people should realise that the country's ability to get out of this situation depended very much on the extent to which they were prepared to be united, cooperate and work together to develop the country.

"In facing this situation too, sometimes we need to forget the question of existing differences," he said.

The people should emphasise elements of similarity which enable them to work together to generate national economic growth based on the spirit of cooperation among the various races.

Dr Mahathir said: "Without unity, our country will not be able to compete at the international level. If this happens, we ourselves will lose out.

"Do not think that unity in the country is already solid and, therefore, we no longer need to strive to enhance the level of unity," he said.

He said such an assumption was totally misplaced and the people should realise that if unity was fragile and easily undermined, it would further complicate efforts by the government and the people to develop the country.

"The positive practice of unity among the people had brought success in Indera Kayangan (during the by-election) recently. Reject division, treasure unity," he said.

He said that in discharging their responsibilities to preserve unity, the people should always give priority to the interests of the community and country and be able to think and act rationally.

The people should realise that their actions, no matter how minor, would have an effect on society, whether good or otherwise, Dr Mahathir said.

"Do not act indiscriminately and hastily but instead we should be more careful in any action we want to take, especially if it touches on the sensitivities of communities around us," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the clash in Jalan Klang Lama here, which was very saddening and had far-reaching effects, and several other incidents which touched on unity had sent an important message to all.

"The bond of unity which we pride ourselves on all this while, if not

protected, can become an egg at the tip of a horn."

He said that sometimes when minor misunderstandings happened, the people let emotions get the better of them although such incidents could be settled amicably.

"It is hoped that this incident can serve as a lesson to all parties. Let's not forget that unity is the basis of the country's stability and prosperity," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he was also very saddened by the action of certain quarters in criticising and hurling all sorts of allegations at the government.

"They are instigating the people and poisoning their minds to hate the government. They also claim that incidents which happened were staged by the government," he said.

He said the government would not compromise on matters involving the country's security and stability, and would act firmly to check any eventuality that could undermine the country's honour and the people's interests.

"However, this does not mean that the government is intolerant or is not adhering to the principles of democracy, but in facing issues which can jeopardise the country's stability, the government needs to take firm action against those involved," he said.

The Prime Minister said this group should help the government to maintain national unity rather than try to split the people for self-interest because this would lead to the country's downfall.

"The people should be aware so that they will not be easily influenced by the narrow religious and political views espoused by certain quarters.

"On the other hand, we need to enhance the spirit of unity and cooperation and act in a more mature and rational manner without being guided by feelings and emotions only," he said.

-- BERNAMA

HK RON YBY