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Unity responsibility of all (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Everyone of us is responsible for preserving unity, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight. He reminded Malaysians that whatever action they decided upon would affect society and the country.

People must act rationally and be sensitive to the fact that Malaysia was a multi-racial society.

The Prime Minister said the interests of the country and society should be placed above other considerations.

"Preserving unity is not the responsibility of the Government alone or certain parties only. In fact, no one is excluded from this task," he said at a unity gathering at Stadium Nasional in Bukit Jalil.

The programme, themed Satu, was officially launched by Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin Syed Putra Jamalullail.

It was organised to reflect the unity and harmony that prevail in the country. The event was telecast live over Radio Televisyen Malaysia.

Among those present were the Raja Permaisuri Agong Tuanku Fauziah Tengku Abdul Rashid, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and National Unity and Social Development Minister Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman.

Dr Mahathir said the perceptions that no further efforts were necessary to strengthen unity in the country were misplaced.

If people were not careful, there was a danger it could collapse, he said, citing last year's incidents in Jalan Klang Lama as an example.

"Although it may involve a slight misunderstanding and could be resolved amicably, people sometimes lose their judgment when they allow emotions to take over.

"I hope this incident will serve as a lesson to all. Don't forget that unity is the pillar of the country's stability and prosperity.

"We should realise that if unity is weak, it will make it more difficult for the Government and the people to develop the country."

He said Malaysians lived in peace and without fear, unlike in some other countries but without unity, Malaysia would not be able to compete globally.

"If this happens, we will be the one who will lose out."

The economic outlook was not that encouraging and overcoming the slowdown depended on the willingness of the people to co-operate and work together.

"In facing these challenges, we need to forget our differences and emphasise what we have in common to stimulate the economy."

Dr Mahathir said he was confident that with such co-operation the economy would emerge stronger and would benefit the people.

While the Government strove to maintain unity, the Prime Minister lamented there were others who were trying to destroy it. Various accusations had been levelled against the Government, and the people had been egged on to hate the administration.

"I would like to stress that the Government will not compromise in dealing with matters involving security and stability. It will act firmly to curb any activities that can jeopardise the country's integrity and well-being of the people."

Dr Mahathir gave an assurance that although stern action would be taken, it did not mean the Government would be intolerant or that the principles of democracy would not be respected.

"To these groups, I call on them to help the Government in maintaining unity and not to wreck it for personal interests as such acts will only destroy our own country."

The Prime Minister said the people must also always be wary of the danger posed by those advocating political and religious views that were narrow-minded. "Instead, we must enhance the spirit of unity and co-operation, besides acting rationally," he said, adding that all must work hard to defuse any tension or conflict of politics, economy, religion and culture.

"Those who live in the same areas must know and understand each other.

The culture of honesty, co-operation and give-and-take must always be practised."

In this respect, the Rukun Tetangga was an important social institution capable of forging unity, he said, adding that the programme could also help monitor and resolve issues at grassroots level before they escalated into more serious problems.

Calling on the National Unity and Social Development Ministry to establish more RT sectors nationwide, especially in areas with a high risk of conflict, the Prime Minister said: "The role of RT should also be expanded to include other social services. The Government will continue to support RT and other social programmes and activities."

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