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Mahathir-Integration

RACIAL INTEGRATION KEY TO NATIONAL STABILITY, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUCHING, Dec 19 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad wants Barisan Nasional (BN) component parties to continue the integration policy practised in Malaysia to ensure racial harmony and stability in the long run.

He said that such a policy had worked very well for the country because it was fortunate to have political parties which were not extreme.

"Political parties in the BN accept the fact this is a multiracial, multicultural and multireligious country and therefore we should be tolerant of other races, cultures, religions and languages," he said when opening the 19th triennial delegates conference of the Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP) at the SUPP headquarters here today.

Dr Mahathir, who is BN chairman, said that the government of the day did not intend to assimilate anybody as the idea had been rejected by the people previously.

"What we want to is to integrate different races and different tribal groups into one society, each one playing its own role with no one higher than the other...this (integration) has worked very well but not assimilation," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that unlike in other countries where migrants had to accept the culture, language and sometimes the religion of the majority, Malaysia did not want to assimilate its people to become one race.

There was no bitterness and anger between the different races because Malaysia was one of the few countries in the world, developed or developing, that allowed the people to have their education in their own languages, have their own schools and yet conformed to the general education policy of the country, he said.

He said that by and large, Malaysians love to see stability and, because of that, they were willing to stay with the political parties which contributed to stability.

The SUPP, as a Sarawak BN component party, was one of those parties which contributed to stability in the state and country and despite having the majority of its members from the Chinese community, was thoughtful of the sensitivity of other non-Chinese members, he said.

"This is characteristic of Malaysians. We are sensitive about other people's feeling and we do not do things that will aggravate matters that can cause tension among us," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that Malaysians should count themselves very lucky with practically everybody being employed, if they want to work in Malaysia, regarded as a haven for people who were dedicated to making a good life for themselves and the country.

"So we can give ourselves (Malaysians) a pat on the back for our achievements so far but the process is still far from over," he said.

"For example, in 1997, when the country went into an economic recession, there were no quarrels, animosity or riots. Fortunately for us, we were able to analyse and tackle the problem in a fair manner to reduce the disparity and tension between the different faces," he said.

On his successor, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who will take over the premiership when he steps down in October next year, Dr Mahathir advised the component BN leaders to give him their full support.

He said that there should be no comparison in leadership style, adding: "Each one will have his own style...his (Abdullah) smile, way of talking is

different from mine but that is normal."

Earlier, SUPP president Tan Sri Dr George Chan said that the party was working towards grooming its future politicians to be a strong team of professional politicians in line with the objective of being a knowledge-based party.

Dr Chan said that the future of the 43-year-old party was very much dependent on the quality and standard of the top leadership at various levels.

"We have to work towards a knowledge-based party. It may take time but we have to begin now," he said.

On national unity, he said that the party would continue to emphasise the need to have a strong bond between different races to ensure the smooth progress of the country's social harmony and economic development.

Present at the opening were Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud, who is Sarawak BN chairman, and leaders of other BN components in the country.

-- BERNAMA

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