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PM: No assimilation of races

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KUCHING, Thurs. - The Government will not assimilate the people into a single race as it believes in integration where no race is superior to another, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said this was the wish of the people who did not want to be assimilated.

He said assimilation in some countries meant having to change names, only speak the language of the country, adopt the religion of the masses and attend schools using the main language of the country as the medium of instruction.

"Malaysia is one of few countries in the world, developed or developing, where people can have their education in their own language, have their own schools, and yet conform to the general education policy.

"Because we allow for this, there is no bitterness or anger between different races. We don't intend to assimilate anybody. What we want to do is integrate the different races and tribal groups into one society, each playing its own role and no one is higher than the other," he said when opening the 19th delegates conference of the Sarawak United Peoples' Party (SUPP) here.

Dr Mahathir said this formula had worked very well despite initial talk of assimilation "but people did not accept it, so we accepted the wishes of the people".

He said one of the primary reasons behind racial harmony and unity in the country today was the Barisan Nasional component parties' acceptance of the fact that Malaysia was a multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-cultural society.

Therefore, there was a need for Malaysians to be tolerant of one another, he added.

The Prime Minister said Malaysians of any one race did not fear having to enter an area dominated by another race or walk the streets in cities and towns.

"We must cherish this. We must make sure that this will be enhanced in the future and the people who can make sure that this will be enhanced must be the parties in the BN," he said.

Dr Mahathir said one of the secrets behind Malaysia's progress since Independence was its people's decision to give top leaders ample time to prove their worth.

Such support was important as a frequent change of posts like that of Prime Minister or Chief Minister could hinder the development process like what was happening in Japan and Italy despite having leaders of calibre.

He said there would always be people not satisfied with the leadership and who felt that leaders in a democratic country should be changed at regular intervals.

"But even powerful countries like Japan, for example, cannot get out of the economic problems because every two years they have a new Prime Minister. During my tenure as PM for the last 21 years, Japan has had 12 PMs but their record is beaten by Italy which has had almost 20.

"When you have a man chosen as PM and give him only two years to create miracles, it is impossible.

"In the first year, you learn how to do your job, to be addressed as Yang Amat Berhormat, and get invited here and there. In the second year, you begin to plan, but when you want to implement your plan by the third

year, you are no longer PM," he said to laughter.

Among those present were SUPP president Tan Sri Dr George Chan, Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu (PBB) president Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud, Sarawak Progressive Democratic Party (SPDP) protem president Datuk William Mawan, Parti Bansa Dayak Sarawak (PBDS) president Datuk Amar Leo Moggie Irok, MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik and PPP president Datuk M. Kayveas.

Dr Mahathir said he had been able to materialise many of his ideas because Malaysians gave him sufficient time to "make mistakes and correct them".

He cited the national car project as an example.

"Supposing in 1985, after the car was produced and we lost money, and I was sacked, finish-lah... no more Proton.

"But because they (people) gave me time and we made corrections, eventually we not only manufactured the Proton but also the Perodua and all kinds of vehicles. We have even produced some parts of the Airbus 380.

"So we have to understand that a person must be given time to accomplish something unless he has done something absolutely wrong or has sold the country to other countries, and all that... I think let's not rock the boat and change the captain and all that."