No plans to transform BN into a single party

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THE Barisan Nasional has no plans to transform the coalition into a single multi-racial party, its chairman Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

The Prime Minister said the present set-up enabled all races to be equally represented and this had, over the years, proven to work effectively.

"There may be a time when we can have that, but for the moment we will worry about the interests of our own race.

"In the BN, we have equal representation in the highest council of the coalition," he said when opening the 32nd Gerakan national delegates' conference at Menara PGRM in Kuala Lumpur.

Also present were Deputy Prime Minister and Deputy BN chairman Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, MCA president Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting, MIC president Datuk S. Samy Vellu and senior BN component party leaders.

Dr Mahathir said with equal representation, the different races could voice their feelings, worries of their community and of their own party.

A single party with multi-racial membership, he said, could result in one race, which is the majority in the party and nation, to dominate it and not give fair consideration to the other races.

"So our system is a unique system and we must work hard to preserve it," he added.

Dr Mahathir also said the BN Government was not interested in the assimilation of the various races, but in their integration.

His greatest achievement since assuming his position in 1981, he said, was helping to preserve unity and strenghtening relations among all Malaysians.

"I am happy that this has happened towards the end of my career.

"Those of Malay origin will retain their characteristics, their religion, language and culture, while Malaysians of Chinese origin will maintain theirs. Similarly with the Indians and people in Sabah and Sarawak."

Dr Mahathir said the architect of national unity was the first Prime Minister, the late Tengku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj. "Since then, leaders of the various races have played their role to preserve unity despite the various challenges.

"Racial and religious differences should never be an obstacle for the people to work together and integrate as Malaysians," he said.

He said when he became the Prime Minister, there was still suspicion among Malaysians, particularly the Chinese community.

"However, this has all since been erased. I was once perceived as a Malay ultra and because of this I had great difficulty in preserving the policy and philosophy of Tengku Abdul Rahman, unlike Tun Abdul Razak Hussein (the second Prime Minister) and Tun Hussein Onn (third Prime Minister)," he said.

Today, he said, this had all

changed.

"When I walked in today, I received loud cheers from Chinese and Indian Gerakan members. This is a good indication that they no longer hold any of the old misgivings about me," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said that Malaysians must not forget history, but be prepared to learn from it to ensure unpleasant incident did not recur.

"In world politics today, we see leaders of great countries who forget the past and even lessons from the recent past," he said.

On Gerakan, he said, like all other parties, the 32-year-old party had its ups and downs.

"A vital aspect of the BN is co-operation and we realise that the political philosophy of the MCA and Gerakan differs.

"However, this difference should not cause enmity and what is important during a general election is the BN and not the individual interest of component parties," he said.

During an election, Dr Mahathir said, a candidate should remember that he was not contesting for Umno, MCA, MIC or other parties in Sabah and Sarawak, but as a BN representative under the BN banner.

He said the BN coalition was unique as it was a pre-election coalition and all member parties faced the election with a common objective.

"Post-election coalitions are usually unhealthy and the objectives among member parties are usually not the same," he added.

With the three-quarters majority now, he said the BN Government could make decisions which might appear unpleasant, but were good for the people.

"We are not a populist Government, but a strong one. We need the strong majority to continue with the national development agenda."