

15 OCT 2003

Mahathir-Non-Malay

DR MAHATHIR SAYS NON-MALAY CAN ONE DAY BECOME PM IF...

PUTRAJAYA, Oct 15 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad says he has not discounted the fact that a non-Malay could one day become Prime Minister of Malaysia, subject to certain conditions.

"It can happen. I have always said there can come a time when a non-Malay might become the prime minister," he said.

However, he stressed that that person has to be acceptable to the Malays who form the majority of the population.

"If a person becomes very concerned about the Malays, fight for their cause, and be fair to everyone, I think the Malays will lose their fear of a non-Malay becoming prime Minister," he said in an interview with Bernama yesterday.

The 70-minute interview was conducted by Bernama chairman Datuk Kalimullah Hassan, editor-in-chief Jaafar Hussin, and executive editors Datuk Azman Ujang and Yong Soo Heong.

"If he is not accepted by the Malays, then it is difficult for him to become the prime minister simply because the Malays are in majority. But it is not impossible," he added. Dr Mahathir was asked whether non-Malays could assume higher political office given that the Barisan Nasional is a coalition of several component parties representing various races in the country.

Asked whether politics in Malaysia would one day be based not on race, he said it was possible but this would come about when all races were equally well developed and enjoy the same status.

In citing examples of the imbalance between the races, he said there had been complaints that the government service does not have enough non-Malays while if one were to look at the private sector, then the number of Malays there was very small.

"You have to balance. This one (public sector) you must increase (in number), this one (private sector) you also have to increase," he said.

On the creation of a Bangsa Malaysia by the year 2020, he said "if we all behave like Malaysians, understand each other's culture and speak a common language, I think eventually we will come together."

Dr Mahathir said that was why the New Economic Policy (NEP) was formulated by the government to ensure that no group was left out and that all races would eventually enjoy the same opportunities and wealth in the country.

To a certain extent, he said the affirmative action through the NEP had succeeded because there was no fighting among the different races during the 1997-99 regional financial crisis.

Asked to describe his relationship with non-Malays during the 22 years as Prime Minister, he said it took a gradual process for them to warm up to him.

He added: "Initially, they distrusted me. Over time, they find out that I am not against them, that I want to be fair to them but I must also promote the interests of the Bumiputeras, the Malays in particular, and when I do that, it must be a balanced thing.

"And sometimes I scold the Malays as people know, and sometimes I scold the Chinese and the Indians if they do something that is unfair to the others. I have been very fair, very balanced in my criticisms. I think over time, they realised that I am not against them, that in fact I was ready to help them."

-- BERNAMA  
SHY JH RM