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Mahathir-Achievement

PRESERVING UNITY AMONG MALAYSIANS MY GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT- DR M

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 23 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who retires at the end of October said today that helping to preserve unity and strengthening good relations among all Malaysians was his greatest achievement as Prime Minister.

"To me this is an achievement which I will always remember," said the Prime Minister when opening the National Delegates Conference of the Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (PGRM) at the Menara PGRM in Cheras here.

He said the architect of national unity was the country's first Prime Minister the late Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj and over the years the leaders of the various races in Malaysia had played their role in preserving unity.

Unity among Malaysians of various races and religions had been preserved and strengthened to this day despite the various challenges being faced, Dr Mahathir said.

In the context of unity, Dr Mahathir said the government was not keen on assimilation of the various races but rather was interested in their integration.

"And I am happy that at the end of my career this has happened. Those of Malay origin will retain their characteristics, their religion, language and culture... Malaysians of Chinese origin will maintain their culture, language and religion and similarly the Indians and people in Sabah and Sarawak ...will maintain their characteristics, religion and identity," he said.

Dr Mahathir said these differences should not be an obstacle for the citizens of this country to work together and integrate as Malaysians.

"Our main objective is to ensure that this country will go on to become fully developed by 2020. It is not too difficult a task. We have proposed that there should be a win-win solution that nobody loses and that everybody will win," he said.

Dr Mahathir recalled that when he became Prime Minister of Malaysia in 1981, there was suspicion among Malaysians particularly among the Chinese community about him but all this suspicion had since been erased.

"When I came in, I was seen with great suspicion, particularly among the Chinese community. This ultra...Malay ultra... this was the perception of me in 1981. Because of this I had great difficulty in preserving the policy and philosophy of Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj unlike Tun Abdul Razak (second Prime Minister) and Tun Hussein Onn (third Prime Minister.)"

"The suspicion against me was strong and it was more difficult for me," added Dr Mahathir.

"But today when I came to this meeting, I was greeted by Chinese and Indian members of Gerakan with great enthusiasm. Hence it is no longer true that they are still holding their 1981 misgivings about me."

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia needed peace and stability and this could only be preserved if Malaysians of various races maintained good relations among them.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysians should learn from History and be guided by it so that unpleasant incidents would not recur in the country.

"And we are seeing in world politics today, leaders of great countries who forget the past and have even forgotten the lessons of the recent past."

"We must always remember our history...the history that has been

fruitful and the unpleasant aspects of our history which we should prevent from recurring," the Prime Minister said.

On the Gerakan party, Dr Mahathir said like other parties it had its ups and downs in the course of its 32-year history.

He said cooperation and good relations between the Gerakan and the MCA, the component party which represented the Chinese community, were vital for the Barisan Nasional (BN).

"We do realise that the political philosophy of the MCA and the Gerakan differs. But this difference should not cause enmity. I was very much amused when Dr Lim (Keng Yaik) said Gerakan is the younger brother of the MCA...I don't think he meant to insult anybody," Dr Mahathir said.

Dr Mahathir said that during the General Election the important thing was the BN and not the individual interests of component parties.

"During the election, we should forget we are from where, as candidates we are not contesting as Umno, MCA or MIC representatives or representatives of parties in Sabah or Sarawak. We are contesting under the banner of the BN. We all wear the BN symbol and we say that we are BN candidates."

Dr Mahathir said the BN coalition concept was unlike other coalitions as the BN coalition was formed before the election and this provided advantages to the BN such as deciding on the candidates who would be contesting.

"The BN is a coalition party. But unlike coalitions in other countries, our's is a coalition before the election. Post-election coalitions are usually unhealthy. The objectives among the member parties are not the same," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the BN needed a strong majority to continue with its national development agenda.

"Today with the three-fourth (3/4 majority) we can make decisions which may appear unpleasant to people but it is for their own good. We are not a populist government but a pragmatic government. We have popular support. We have to maintain a strong government for a long, long time because we still need development."

-- BERNAMA

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