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Mahathir-MCA

DR M PRAISES MCA FOR RESOLVING PARTY DISPUTE BEFORE POLLS

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 10 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today he is glad that MCA has resolved its internal problems in a unique way, and that too before the next general election.

"I am impressed with the methods used by MCA to settle the problem so wisely, and now MCA is united again," he said when opening the 50th MCA General Assembly at Wisma MCA here.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Barisan Nasional (BN) chairman, said although a handful were still not satisfied, "I believe eventually they will subscribe to the unity of MCA."

Praising Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik and Datuk Seri Lim Ah Lek for stepping down as MCA president and deputy president respectively for the sake of the party, Dr Mahathir described their action as a noble sacrifice.

Dr Ling and Lim, who were present at the opening, resigned their posts last May 23, paving the way for Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting to take over as president and Datuk Chan Kong Choy as deputy president as a formula for resolving the party's leadership crisis.

"Let bygones be bygones and there is no point in holding a grudge," said Dr Mahathir, who stressed the importance of MCA remaining united as a BN component representing the Chinese.

He expressed confidence in the ability of Ong, who is Housing and Local Government Minister, and Chan, who has replaced Dr Ling as Transport Minister, to lead the MCA.

"I see that the new leaders of MCA are cooperating well...I can also see close communication between Ong and Chan," he said.

Describing MCA and Umno as close friends, Dr Mahathir, who is Umno president, said when MCA faced problems, Umno would feel them too.

"When MCA is sick, Umno becomes ill and Barisan Nasional gets a headache...when Umno is sick, MCA falls ill and we all get headaches," he said, a remark which had the 2,000 delegates in stitches.

Also present at the opening were Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, leaders of BN component parties and MCA veterans, including life president Tan Sri Lee San Choon.

Dr Mahathir said the resolution of the MCA problems had been smooth, likening it to pulling a thread out of flour without spilling the flour.

He also expressed Umno's gratitude to MCA for helping Umno Baru return to BN when Umno was declared illegal in 1987.

Dr Ling, who then became the BN chairman, accepted Umno Baru into the fold and this showed the close cooperation and ties between the two parties, which have been cooperating since 1955 and were jointly responsible for forming the Alliance, and then the BN.

Dr Mahathir also urged MCA to boost ties with other BN component parties, especially Gerakan, in facing the general election.

Describing Gerakan as a 'younger brother' of MCA, the Prime Minister said: "The older brother (MCA) should love the younger brother, (while) the younger sibling should not create problems."

When asked on the matter at a press conference later, Dr Mahathir said he was just joking and that the two parties did not have problems.

In his speech, Dr Mahathir said it was for BN to determine its candidates for the next general election and the areas they would contest in.

Once the decisions were made, the question of candidates would no

longer arise, and whether the candidates were Malays, Chinese, Indians or Kadazan, they were representing the BN, he said.

"BN will give its support irrespective who the candidate is," he said.

Touching on the coalition among opposition parties, Dr Mahathir described it as a "marriage of convenience" resembling the act of "khalwat" (close proximity) because the parties had many differences.

He likened their cooperation to a smartly dressed man whose appearance was deceiving.

"In front they are cooperating, but at the back, thinking of how to defeat DAP, how to defeat PAS and the like," he said.

"We in BN has found a common thread which has created cooperation among component parties and has reduced conflicts," he said.

He said the willingness of BN members to sacrifice some of their needs was key to the ruling coalition's success.

"Having a slice of a growing cake rather than a whole shrinking cake" was the successful formula in the country to ensure continuous stability, peace and prosperity, he said.

-- BERNAMA

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