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PM: Thanks for the support (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - Five days before he steps down as Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today thanked the people for not "chasing" him out of power and allowing him to step down at the right time and on his own free will.

He said he was thankful to the people for their continued support, even as he was about to retire.

Dr Mahathir added that although he would not hold any political position after his retirement, he would continue campaigning for the Barisan Nasional at all elections.

"I do not want to hold any position, not even as senior Cabinet minister, but I will campaign for all BN component parties.

"This is because I believe that only the BN can bring development and prosperity to Malaysia," he said when opening the People's Progressive Party 50th general assembly at the Putra World Trade Centre.

After 29 years in the Government, including 22 years as Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir said it was time for him to retire.

"I'm retiring as I've been in the Government for quite long ... since 1974, it's about time I retire," he added.

Present at the assembly were Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Information Minister Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob and BN component party leaders.

Dr Mahathir said the Government had succeeded in giving the people a good life and made Malaysia a proud and reputable country by doing things "our way" and that it was his hope that the people would always preserve this.

He said Malaysia had succeeded in doing many things not done in other countries, including making every festive celebration a national event not for a single race, but for all races to strengthen unity.

As a result of doing it "our way", Dr Mahathir said Malaysians worldwide were now proud of who they were.

"This is a new feeling. A feeling of pride to be a Malaysian, wherever one may be.

"I was in Papua New Guinea recently. Previously, there were probably no Malaysians there, but now there are 3,000 working and doing business there. They are all successful and are proud and do not forget that they are from Malaysia."

Dr Mahathir said the BN was a coalition with different fundamentals and its success is attributed to its unselfishness in power sharing.

"Though sometimes we may have misunderstandings, it has been our practice to resolve it within the BN family.

"If we openly criticise another party for any reason, that party is sure to react and this in turn will cause disunity among us," he said.

The Prime Minister also reminded Malaysians that knowledge and capabilities alone could not ensure the nation's success and it was important that the people lead a noble life.

Without a noble culture, he said one's knowledge and capabilities could be abused for negative intentions.

"Though we may be able to study until we obtain a doctorate or even a PhD, if our culture is bad, we may misuse what we have learnt, possibly even to plan a bank robbery.

"That is why it is important that we need not only knowledge, but a good

culture. This is to ensure we do good and are successful," he said.

However, he said that despite the country's success, there were still extremists who went all out to oppose the Government's efforts to foster unity.

"Even the Government's effort to get nonMalay students to study in national schools to promote unity was construed by these groups as an attempt to sideline vernacular schools.

"The Government's move to set up vision schools was also interpreted by some as an attempt to eradicate the mother tongue of the other races," he said.

"It was merely to foster unity. In other countries in Southeast Asia and the United States, there are no vernacular schools. In Australia, there are no Chinese schools funded by the Australians.

"We have been fair to all and there is no reason why anyone should be unhappy," he added.