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PM: No power struggle (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the transition of power would be smooth and Barisan Nasional policies would be continued when he steps down next month.

"At the end of October, I will relinquish the post (of Prime Minister) happily because there is a successor. There is no power struggle," Dr Mahathir said at the 50th anniversary of the BN, themed Kongsu Kuasa Kejayaan Malaysia (Power-Sharing is Malaysia's Success), at Stadium Merdeka.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, BN secretary-general Tan Sri Mohamed Rahmat and component party leaders, including MCA president Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting, MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu, Gerakan president Datuk Seri Lim Keng Yaik, Peoples' Progressive Party president Datuk M. Kayveas and Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu president Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud, were among those present.

He also said the policies outlined since BN's inception would be continued because of the understanding among the component parties.

"We are a group of Government with joint responsibilities and believe in the policies of BN.

"That's why when Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi takes over, he will openly pledge to continue with the BN struggle."

Dr Mahathir, who is also BN chairman, said the BN cause which was laid out by the nation's first Prime Minister, the late Tengku Abdul Rahman, had been continued by his successors.

He said Tun Abdul Razak, Tun Hussein Onn and he himself had continued this and therefore there should not be any doubt about Abdullah's commitment.

"Hence, I urge BN members and supporters to give their full support to Abdullah.

"He is the successor and the BN leader. All promises made by BN (to the people) will be fulfilled by this new leadership. There will be no change of policies, maybe only his style is different."

Dr Mahathir added that a continuation of present policies would bring progress to the country and turn Malaysia into a developed nation by 2020 and a model to the world.

At a Press conference later, Dr Mahathir expressed relief knowing that BN was strong before handing over power to Abdullah, whom he said had the co-operation of the BN component parties.

"I am glad none has given negative views. All have been supportive of Pak Lah (Abdullah). So, I leave with a sense of relief."

On Abdullah's capability to lead the BN to face the next general election, Dr Mahathir said Abdullah had proven that the BN could achieve victory, even without his direct support.

"I think Pak Lah can. Even in the past, Pak Lah played a major role in the election. In fact, I didn't have to go to the ground. I left it to Pak Lah. So no problem-lah."

Dr Mahathir, who is confident that the BN could retain its two-thirds majority in the next general election, said he would go down to the ground to campaign for BN, including in Pas-controlled States of Terengganu and Kelantan.

"I will campaign because I do not forget. Many people had campaigned for me and I was able to become the Prime Minister. Now, it is my turn to

repay them."

On the BN's chances of recapturing Kelantan and Terengganu from Pas, Dr Mahathir said the BN now was in a better position.

Dr Mahathir reminded all BN members to continue developing the country as the people would benefit if the country was progressive.

He said that BN was not shy in asking for the people's support because the coalition realised that it could only be of service to the people if it obtained a strong mandate.

"If we have few seats, we cannot concentrate on development. Instead, concentration will be on how to survive politically.

"We thank the people for returning us to power with a strong mandate. In every election, we obtained two-thirds majority in Parliament.

"It was thought that the BN was weak in 1999 and there were people dreaming of forming the Government. But in that year, we won not two-thirds but three-quarters of the seats."

Dr Mahathir attributed BN's success to the people having faith and trust in the coalition to deliver on its promises.

He said because the BN power-sharing concept had proven to be successful, the Opposition emulated it by forming the Barisan Alternatif.

"It is an imitation party, a synthetic party. They formed a coalition with the intention of cheating (the people).

"How unfortunate it is for those who supported the Opposition coalition as it had not brought any development compared to BN."

Dr Mahathir urged the people to compare States controlled by BN with those under the Opposition.

"This is the result of making the wrong choice. We do not deny their religious knowledge but they do not have the knowledge to run a Government."

Dr Mahathir also reflected on the history of the BN when it began as the Alliance, and spoke of its achievements now as a coalition of 14 component parties.

He said its success had attracted the attention of many foreign leaders who wanted to know the secret of the power-sharing success of the BN which represents various ethnic groups.

The Prime Minister was also asked whether smaller BN component parties in Sabah and Sarawak would be asked to merge and form a bigger coalition party.

He said it was up to the parties as they were representing various races and ethnic groups.

"In Malaysia, we do not force on anyone to accept anything. We want all races to be free with their ways."