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Tolerance and moderation

SOME sceptics maintained that Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad would not step down when he announced his wish to retire as Prime Minister. It looks like the cynics will be forced to eat their words at the end of this month.

Dr Mahathir has thanked the people for not "chasing" him out of power and allowing him to retire at the right time and of his own free will. He has disclosed that he had planned to retire much earlier, but the time was not right. Unexpected political and economic developments had forced him to defer his decision. His intention to exercise his free will was thwarted by the Umno General Assembly and he had to reschedule his retirement plans. Now he is leaving of his own accord because he feels that it is time to go, because he has been in the Government for a long time.

At the opening of the 50th general assembly of the People's Progressive Party, Dr Mahathir said he would continue to campaign for the Barisan Nasional because he believes that only the BN can bring development and prosperity. As he pointed out, the success of the coalition is based on its fair power-sharing formula. Dr Mahathir has often said that he sees himself as someone who has built on the policies he inherited from his predecessors. They were all committed to constructing a nation where people from different religions, races, and cultures could live together in peace and prosperity, and develop a strong sense of nationhood. The sense of being Malaysian is growing stronger. As the Prime Minister pointed out, Malaysians worldwide are now proud of who they are. "This is a new feeling. A feeling of pride to be a Malaysian, wherever one may be."

However, there are extremists who are bent on destroying the Government's efforts to foster unity. This is why it is important more than ever to maintain the spirit of tolerance. Moderate Malaysians from every walk of life must stand firm against the extremists in our midst who would like to tear asunder the Malaysian middle ground. This is the best tribute we can pay Dr Mahathir.