

Dr M says ill-defined 1 Malaysia to blame for race problems
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By G Manimaran

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 13 — Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that the different perceptions and interpretations of Datuk Seri Najib Razak's 1 Malaysia concept had led to a deterioration in race relations with more demands made against the administration.

He said the Malays now felt aggrieved while the non-Malays wanted Bumiputera rights abolished.

"It is difficult for us to think that there can be unity with just a slogan," the former PM said in an interview with satellite broadcaster Astro Awani that was aired today.

Dr Mahathir has become increasingly vocal in recent weeks in what appears to be a push to pressure Najib ahead of an impending general election. — file pic
He pointed out that both the Malays and non-Malays felt the government was now favouring the other.

"Malays feel that the Chinese are being treated better while they get nothing. I hope the Budget will strike a balance between the treatment of the Malays and non-Malays.

"Then only will some of the anger against the government disappear."

The prime minister will table next year's Budget on October 7.

This could be the PM's last Budget before the next general election expected by early 2012.

Najib is expected to table an election budget by introducing populist policies to tackle rising costs and address general unhappiness over the glacial pace of reforms.

Dr Mahathir has become increasingly vocal in recent weeks in what appears to be a push to pressure Najib ahead of an impending general election.

Yesterday, Dr Mahathir suggested that Najib refrain from calling a general election soon, advising the prime minister to use the time to work on his preferred list of Barisan Nasional (BN) candidates instead.

He also said yesterday that "extremists" from each of the country's three major races were making increasingly unwarranted demands, adding that such incidents did not happen during his tenure as prime minister.

The former PM said that Malays, Chinese and Indians needed to accept the fact that it was impossible for the government to fully meet each community's demands.

Racial and religious tensions have continued to mount since 2009, following a High Court ruling that found the Catholic Church has a constitutional right to use the term "Allah" in the Bahasa Malaysia edition of its newspaper The Herald.

The ruling sparked a series of arson attacks on churches and other places of worship.

A proposal to move a Hindu temple to a largely Malay area in Shah Alam also saw a protest in which the severed head of a cow was dragged openly through the streets of the Selangor capital. Cows are considered sacred in Hinduism.

Right-wing groups, such as Perkasa, have claimed that Malays are currently under siege, and that the government needs to do more to defend their rights that they maintain are being eroded.

A recent survey by pollsters Merdeka Center found that Malaysians believe inter-racial relations have deteriorated over the past five years due to distrust among the different races.

Dr Mahathir said in Astro Awani interview today that he still had confidence that Najib would be able to fulfil the hopes of both the Malays and non-Malays.

"I hope Datuk Seri Najib realises that the Malays feel aggrieved and alienated. He has to ensure he does not alienate the Malays while protecting the interests of the non-Malays," said Dr Mahathir.

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