

Dr M: May 13 bogeyman kept BN united
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By Shannon Teoh

KUALA LUMPUR, April 14 — Fears that Malaysians would meet again in another bloody racial clash like the 1969 riots had helped keep Barisan Nasional (BN) united for over four decades, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has said.

The former prime minister said this had given the country stability under the ruling coalition he had led for 22 years, allowing “unprecedented growth” to take place and transform Malaysia into an industrialised country.

“Fear of race riots recurring helped to keep the BN parties together. And so from 1971 until today the country enjoyed peace and stability under BN Governments,” he said in a blog posting yesterday.

Dr Mahathir (picture), who became PM just 12 years after losing in the 1969 general elections that led to the May 13 race riots, explained that when the country was still struggling for independence, “there was a great deal of animosity between the Malays and Chinese.”

“We have almost forgotten it now but the Japanese surrender saw the mainly Chinese Anti-Japanese guerrillas emerging from the jungles, declaring that they now rule the country. There were clashes between the Malays and the Chinese and several were killed on each side,” he wrote.

He said that while the Chinese ran businesses, the Malays cultivated paddy, went fishing and were very poor.

“The Malays felt threatened and their reaction was to unite and form a Malay political party — the United Malays National Organisation

(Umno). It was solely dedicated to... upholding Malay rights. There was no desire to cooperate with the Chinese at all, certainly not for achieving Merdeka,” he said.

Dr Mahathir, who resigned from active politics in 2003, said in order to achieve independence, Umno worked with MCA to “allay British suspicions that independence would lead to seizure of Chinese properties by the Malays.”

“The cooperation worked so well that the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) decided to join it. And so the alliance of racial parties was formed. But Malay animosity towards the Chinese and Chinese dissatisfaction with the terms of the social contract was still extant, so that in 1969, race riots broke out.

“Foreigners as well as many Malaysians concluded that the fragile coalition had failed. But Tun Razak resurrected it and formed an even bigger coalition, the BN,” he said.

Malaysia's worst ethnic riots occurred on May 13, 1969, which some reports say had killed over 2,000.

They were sparked off after opposition parties had denied the Umno-led Alliance its customary two-thirds majority in Parliament on the back of unhappiness by Chinese over perceived favouritism showed to Malays.

A victory parade by the opposition in Kuala Lumpur led to a strong reaction by Malays and a state of emergency was declared.

But some researchers have blamed the Umno-led counter-procession that began at the residence of then Selangor menteri besar Datuk Harun Idris for the violence.

Then prime minister Tunku Abdul Rahman later called the retaliatory parade "inevitable, as otherwise the party members would be demoralised after the show of strength by the opposition and the insults that had been thrown at them."

Dr Mahathir also said in his blog that unlike the opposition Pakatan Rakyat (PR), BN had an added element that is needed for a coalition to work.

"Although it is an alliance of equals, it needs a strong core which can act as the first among equals. The core will act as referee whenever the other components fail to agree with each other.

"On the other hand the core must not be too strong as to be able to go on its own. If it fails to get the support of the others it will also fail," he said.

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