

'Preserve national unity

S 31/10/2003 - 2 PRECISE

PM: Understanding, tolerance and respect are important

KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, on the eve of his retirement, made an impassioned plea to Malaysians to preserve national unity come what may.

"We must never forget that national unity is our greatest asset.

"In fact, it is the only asset that makes it possible for us to enjoy the other assets that the Almighty has showered on this land in abundance," he said.

He said Malaysians had to constantly and tirelessly work to strengthen national unity and take immediate action to curb tendencies that could work against national interest.

"No one should have a narrow viewpoint and accuse the Government of trying to destroy the culture and language of any race," he said in concluding his tabling of the Mid-Term Review of the Eighth Malaysia Plan in the Dewan Rakyat yesterday.

He said national unity in a multi-ethnic and multireligious country could only be maintained if there was a high level of understanding, tolerance and mutual respect among the people.

"We have seen how many other multi-ethnic societies have failed because each race places its own interest first before the interest of the nation.

"If we are not careful, we too will fail and be destroyed," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the success of a nation depended on its citizens.

"The colour of the skin, racial heritage or natural resources are not the most important factors, and certainly cannot determine success," he said.

"What determines success is the culture or the value system which is accepted and practised," he said.

He urged Malaysians to be prepared for any challenge that came their way.

"It has been my pleasant experience

during my tenure as Prime Minister to find all Malaysians rallying together in the face of a crisis," he said, while ministers and MPs who packed the House thumped their tables in agreement.

"This uniquely Malaysian characteristic must be maintained at all costs and should never be sacrificed in the interest of expediency or parochial self-interest or political opportunism.

"As I resign from the nation's highest elected office, I call upon every Malaysian to rise to the occasion to face the challenges as they emerge and shoulder the responsibilities of citizenship," he said.

If this was done, there was no reason Malaysia could not remain successful and make the country a model for the world to emulate *Malaysia Boleh*, he said.

■ See StarBiz for 12-page special report on the Mid-Term Review



Dr Mahathir: Called on Malaysians to face challenge that may come to ensure that country remains successful.