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INTERVIEW-INFO

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EMBARGO: FOR RELEASE AFTER 11 PM TODAY, JAN 22

KUALA LUMPUR, JAN 22 (BERNAMA) -- THE GOVERNMENT IS PREPARED TO BE UNPOPULAR RATHER THAN DIVULGE INFORMATION TO THE PEOPLE WHICH IS DETRIMENTAL TO THE INTEREST OF THE NATION; DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD SAID TONIGHT.

HE SAID THE GOVERNMENT, IN DIVULGING INFORMATION, HAD TO CONSIDER NOT ONLY THE QUESTION OF ITS POPULARITY BUT ALSO ITS RESPONSIBILITY.

+IF A CERTAIN PIECE OF INFORMATION IS DETRIMENTAL TO THE INTEREST OF THE NATION, THEN THE GOVERNMENT HAS TO WITHHOLD SUCH INFORMATION FROM THE PEOPLE,+ HE SAID DURING RTM'S +EHWAL SEMASA+ PROGRAMME.

+WE CANNOT DIVULGE THE INFORMATION MERELY FOR THE SAKE OF GAINING POPULARITY,+ THE PRIME MINISTER SAID TO A QUESTION ON WHETHER THE GOVERNMENT UNDER HIS LEADERSHIP WAS A LIBERAL AND OPEN ONE.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID THAT IN PUTTING TO PRACTICE THE GOVERNMENT'S OPEN AND LIBERAL POLICY, IT HAD GIVEN EVERYONE THE OPPORTUNITY TO VOICE OPINIONS FREELY THROUGH THE NEWSPAPERS, AND SEMINARS.

+THEY DO CRITICISE THE GOVERNMENT AND WE HAVE TO ACCEPT THIS BECAUSE WE FEEL THAT IT IS A FORM OF FEEDBACK TO DETERMINE WHETHER WE HAVE DONE THINGS CORRECTLY,+ HE SAID. -- MORE
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DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID, HOWEVER, THAT THE GOVERNMENT GAVE INFORMATION IF IT DID NOT COMPROMISE THE INTERESTS OF THE NATION.

+OUR PRIORITY IS RESPONSIBILITY, NOT POPULARITY. IF WE DO SOMETHING TO HURT THE NATION IN OUR EAGERNESS TO GAIN POPULARITY AS A LIBERAL GOVERNMENT, THEN WE ARE AN IRRESPONSIBLE GOVERNMENT,+ HE SAID.

THE PRIME MINISTER GAVE INSTANCES WHERE THE GOVERNMENT WAS ACCUSED OF NOT DISCLOSING INFORMATION WHEN IN FACT IT WAS WITHHOLDING THE INFORMATION FOR SPECIFIC INTERESTS.

+IN THIS MODERN AGE, WE HAVE A VERY EFFECTIVE MASS MEDIA WHICH IS ALWAYS ASKING ABOUT ALL KINDS OF THINGS. FOR EXAMPLE, THEY WANT TO KNOW OUR STAND WHEN NEGOTIATING WITH ANOTHER PARTY. THIS IS NO LONGER NEGOTIATIONS.

+IN SUCH A SITUATION WE CANNOT COME TO A COMPROMISE. SO THIS IS OUR PROBLEM, LEADING TO ACCUSATIONS THAT WE ARE NOT PREPARED TO GIVE FULL INFORMATION,+ HE SAID.

ON THE TWO CASES OF JOURNALISTS CHARGED UNDER THE OFFICIAL SECRETS ACT, DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID THEY RELATED TO PUBLIC DISCLOSURE OF DOCUMENTS WHICH WERE REGARDED GOVERNMENT CLASSIFIED SECRETS. -- MORE
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+FOR EXAMPLE, IF WE WANT TO PURCHASE ARMS, AND IT IS REVEALED TO THE PUBLIC FROM SUCH DOCUMENTS THE TYPES OF ARMS REQUIRED, THEN OUR ENEMIES WILL KNOW OUR PLANS. FURTHERMORE, PROSPECTIVE ARMAMENT SUPPLIERS WILL ALSO GET TO KNOW OUR REQUIREMENTS AND TRY TO QUALIFY TO SELL THEIR GOODS, GIVING ALL SORTS OF REASONS, + HE EXPLAINED.

THE SAME APPLIED TO ANY STRATEGY MALAYSIA MIGHT HAVE TOWARDS ANOTHER COUNTRY +AS A GUIDELINE FOR US TO DETERMINE OUR STAND.+

+STRATEGY, MEANING AN ACTION PLAN WE HAVE FORMED BUT WHICH WE KEEP SECRET FROM THE TARGET. IF THE TARGET GETS TO KNOW ABOUT IT, THEN IT IS NO LONGER A STRATEGY. IF A PERSON EXPOSES SUCH SECRETS THEN WE WILL HAVE TO TAKE ACTION,+ DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID.

ON THE BMF ISSUE, THE PRIME MINISTER SAID THAT THE GOVERNMENT TOOK A LONG TIME TO DECIDE WHETHER THE FINAL REPORT BY THE COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY SHOULD BE MADE PUBLIC OR NOT BECAUSE IT HAD TO STUDY THE 1,000-ODD-PAGE REPORT CAREFULLY TO STUDY LEGAL IMPLICATIONS WHICH MIGHT ARISE. -- BERNAMA

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