

Government's patience not sign of weakness, says Dr M

PM warns those calling for referendum

By K.P. Waran

KOTA KINABALU, Thurs. — The Government's patience over calls from certain quarters that a referendum be held to determine whether Sabah should leave Malaysia should not be misconstrued as a sign of weakness, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said the Federation of Malaysia was formed after the people's opinion was sought many years ago. There cannot be referendums over and over again because this could bring about chaos, he said.

The Government would not hesitate to take action against these quarters especially since they were violating the law by calling for a referendum, Dr Mahathir said.

The Prime Minister was replying to reporters' questions on the calls made by several politicians in Sabah for a referendum to decide whether the people of Sabah want the State to continue to be in the Federation.

The Federal Constitution does not allow for another referendum, he said, adding that the Government would come down hard against those who called for one.

If the need arises, the Internal Security Act will be used to detain those who had been making such calls

and who were found to be involved in activities which may jeopardise the nation's stability and security.

"The Government is monitoring the situation and does not want to use its powers wantonly. This (calling for a referendum) is against the Federal Constitution.

"At the moment these calls have not jeopardised national security but if allowed to continue, they may do so. We do not want the issue to grow into a major one and become dangerous and threaten us," he said.

Speaking to newsmen after addressing a large crowd in Kota Belud, about 100km from here, Dr Mahathir said the Government on its part would continue to keep the public informed about the dangers of such actions.

The Government does not want a situation in Malaysia similar to that in some other countries where civil war and racial strife are causing misery to the people.

In his address, Dr Mahathir said Sabah had made a decision to be a part of the Federation. There was no question of going against the decision made under the auspices of the United Nations.

On allegations that the Internal Security Act was used only against Opposition politicians, Dr Mahathir said this was baseless. Even Government

supporters have been detained under the Act.

Asked to comment on the overtures by some Parti Bersatu Sabah leaders who wanted the party to return to the Barisan Nasional, Dr Mahathir said the coalition's doors have never been closed, but it is a difficult situation when a party wants to pull out and then rejoin the coalition.

"The BN wants members who are sincere, committed and would 'swim or sink' with it."

The Prime Minister and Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah later left for Kuching.

Among those at the airport to send off the Prime Minister were Chief Minister Datuk Seri Joseph Pairin Kitingan, State Umno deputy liaison chief Tun Datu Haji Mustapha Datu Harun, Minister of Land and Co-operative Development Tan Sri Haji Sakaran Dandai, Minister of National Unity and Community Development Datuk Napsiah Omar and State Cabinet Ministers.

Dr Mahathir arrived here yesterday evening. He unveiled a memorial this morning in Kota Belud to commemorate Umno's victory in the Usukan by-election in May.

Last night he attended a dinner jointly hosted by the Sabah Chinese Chamber of Commerce and the Sabah Bumiputera Chamber of Commerce.