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THE QUESTION OF BAHASA NON-ISSUE, SAYS MAHATHIR

Mahathir-language

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KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 3 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today he failed to understand the motive of those who raised the issue of use of Bahasa Malaysia when the matter was already a non-issue.

+The people themselves no longer question it. .. they understand the status accorded to Bahasa Malaysia and the position occupied by English and other languages in the country, and there should no longer be any dispute,+ the Prime Minister said after chairing a meeting of the Umno Supreme Council at the party's headquarters here.

Dr Mahathir, who is Umno president; , said the freedom enjoyed by the press in the country did not prohibit, the media from raising the issue but he said he hoped that. the press would give preference to national interests.

+If -the press feels responsible and has no other issue to raise except this matter, and for particular reasons, it is up to the press.. .we have press freedom.

+But we trust that journalists and editors have a responsibility, not only to sell their newspapers but to take into account, national interests ,+ he said when commenting on reports published recently by, the Utusan Malaysia newspaper suggesting that Malaysian radio and television no longer carry advertisements in the English language. -- more

▼03/10/15-48MST

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Mahathir-language 2 Kuala Lumpur

The supreme council discussed at length the polemics of the language in the newspaper which also questioned Dr Mahathir's interview in English with a private Indonesian television station during the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) summit in Jakarta last month.

Dr Mahathir said the policy on languages in the country had not changed, as Malay was the national and official language while English was the second language for trade and knowledge purposes.

Asked whether advertisements in English would continue to be allowed on television, he said that as English was a commercial language, it was up to the advertisers to use the language if they felt, it would sell. their goods.

+I do not. think there are firms that would purposely put out advertisements that the people do not understand because advertisements are aimed at attracting attention. ..that is why there are no advertisements in Russian or French (in Malaysia) because maybe many people do not understand them,+ he said.

Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim tol-d-. the press conference the polemics- of the language were discussed at length because the supreme council was dissatisfied with the inclination of the particular group to attempt to raise doubts among the people on the government.' s firmness in the language issue. -- more

▼03/10/17-33MST

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Mahathir-language 3 Kuala Lumpur

'The Finance Minister said that while the government had not changed its policy on the position of the Malay language', -the use of English. must be upgraded in line with the economic situation and 'international trade,.

Anwar said the national leaders should not have to apologise for using English at international fora which involve the participation of foreigners.

Party secretary-general Datuk Mohamed Rahmat also explained that Dr Mahathir's interview with Rajawali Citra Televisi Indonesia (RCTI) was conducted in English at the request of the television station for the benefit of the NAM delegates and, the foreign community in Jakarta.

+It is not that -the prime minister did not want to speak in Bahasa Malaysia but the television station wanted to do the interview in English,+ said Mohamed who is Information Minister. -- more

▼03/10/17-41MST

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Mahat.hir-language 4 (last) Kuala Lumpur

The prime minister *only* smiled when 'asked whether he would demand a public apology from the newspaper which had claimed that he had wanted the interview to be conducted in English.

However, Wanita Umno chief Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz, who 'was also present, said the apology should be made without the prime minister having to ask for it..

Anwar said: +I feel. that if the media is responsible.. .while we respect their 'rights to make criticisms, if they have made a mistake, they should apologise.+

Another party vice-president, Da tuk Seri Sanusi Junid, said the newspaper should apologise because it had stated that: it would do so if it was found that it had made a mistake.

+Now it is clear that it has made a mistake but it remains silent,+ he said.

Following the newspaper's questioning of his sincerity regarding the Malay language, Dr Mahathir wrote to the Utusan Group editor-in-chief who published the letter in full on Sept 19. -- Bernama

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