

13 SEP 1996

Anwar-Singapore

M'SIA DID NOT WANT TO PROLONG MERITOCRACY ISSUE, SAYS ANWAR

BANGI, Sept 13 (Bernama) -- Umno did not respond immediately to Singapore's inference that there is no meritocracy and harmony in Malaysia because it did not want to prolong the issue, Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said today.

"The matter was raised in June, we kept quiet but it was repeated many times, and this prompted the prime minister to respond," he said.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, after the Umno supreme council meeting last week had said that the party was offended by the comments of Singapore leaders that the republic might be forced to re-merge with Malaysia on Malaysia's terms if Singaporeans failed economically.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president, had said that the comments were insincere and were intended to frighten Singaporeans as it tried to show that there was no meritocracy in Malaysia. He, however, stressed that this was Umno's stand and not that of the government.

Anwar told reporters after opening the National Taxation Academy, here, that the issue could be debated but it was not that simple.

He was asked why it had taken Malaysia over three months to respond to the comments made by the Singapore leaders.

Anwar said Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong should have realised that Dr Mahathir's first reaction on the matter was mild and accommodating.

But when the issue was raised again and again he had to give a firm response after studying and taking into account all the statements made by the Singapore leaders, he added. -- BERNAMA