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Mahathir-Bosnia

MAHATHIR OVERCOME BY EMOTION WHEN RECALLING BOSNIAN SUFFERING

KUALA LUMPUR, April 4 (Bernama) -- The plight of the people of war-torn Bosnia-Herzegovina was so moving that it even a leader like Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is noted for his tough stand, was overcome by emotion.

Two minutes into his speech at the presentation of contributions to the Bosnia educational aid fund, the prime minister suddenly stopped, choked by emotion.

Visibly upset, he tried to continue but sadness again clouded his face, and he excused himself and left the podium without completing his speech.

Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak and Director-General of Education Tan Sri Dr Wan Mohamed Zahid Wan Noordin escorted him to his seat.

The gathering of some 500 people at the ministry's Education Technology Division Auditorium in Bukit Kiara was also moved and they stood up and applauded the prime minister. Several of them, including Bosnian women, were seen wiping away their tears.

At the time, Dr Mahathir was speaking about the atrocities in Bosnia which, he said, were witnessed by millions all over the world but no one extended any aid.

His voice wavering, he said: "Bosnia is an extraordinary tragedy which should not have happened in the modern world. It was clearly seen with witnesses all over the world but none gave any help.

"We know that when the incident occurred there were people who could help but did not."

The presentation of donations totalling RM3,234,881 million to the prime minister was telecast live by Televisyen Malaysia over its Educational TV channel.

The collection from Malaysian teachers and students is for the reconstruction of a school in Sarajevo. It is expected to be handed over to the Bosnian government by Dr Mahathir when he visits the Balkan state in the middle of this month.

The fund was launched by Najib on Jan 24 this year.

Dr Mahathir later talked to Bosnian children from Sekolah Rendah Kebangsaan Seri Serdang and posed for photographs with them.

He was overheard asking a boy named Pajic Vernes Saed, 9, when he was returning to Bosnia, to which the boy replied in fluent Bahasa Malaysia that he did not know.

One of the prime minister's aides said the atmosphere at the event, which included the screening of a video on the Bosnians' sufferings, expression of their feelings by Bosnian children in Malaysia and the presentation of a song, "Bosnia, I'm Your Son," could have touched Dr Mahathir's heart.

In his speech, Dr Mahathir said he was proud of the Malaysians' generosity in extending aid to the Bosnians.

"This is a good effort. We should be aware of the sufferings of people in other countries. In Malaysia, we live in peace and are free from the threat of the enemy's guns and cannons. However, in Bosnia, the enemy not only kills soldiers but also children and the aged," he added.

Approached by reporters after the prime minister left, Najib said it was the first time he had seen Dr Mahathir so moved.

He added: "It was unprecedented, and I think we were all touched. I

think it speaks volumes for the deep emotions that he has over the issue.

"It strikes a deep chord in his inner self and for the prime minister not to continue speaking speaks volumes for his feelings for the Bosnian people, for the injustice, the oppression, the tyranny and the genocidal policies that have been committed."

Najib said Dr Mahathir's close aides told him that this was the first time in 15 years that the prime minister had stopped in mid-sentence while delivering a speech.

"He has never stopped his speech before. I've been following him for so long... he has never done so," he said.

Najib said what the prime minister had shown was that: "Once you're so committed with an issue, you feel so much for the people, for the innocent ones who have been punished for no wrong-doing on their part at all.

"The fact that the prime minister did not finish his speech is so meaningful... I think that would touch the hearts of every Malaysian."

Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz said Dr Mahathir's show of emotion proved that at heart he was like any other human being despite his being vocal on issues that were close to his heart. -- BERNAMA

MOK JK LDB