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Parliament-Perwaja

I'M NOT PROTECTING ANYONE, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, May 6 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that he is not protecting anyone in relation to the Perwaja Steel affair.

He told the Dewan Rakyat that action would be taken against the guilty party in accordance with the law even if there were his children and friends.

The Prime Minister also said that he did not know the whereabouts of former Perwaja Steel managing director Tan Sri Eric Chia.

He said that Karpal Singh (DAP-Jelutong) could lodge a police report on his allegations that Chia was in his house.

Dr Mahathir however questioned Karpal Singh's sincerity in reporting to the police on Chia's alleged disappearance.

"He has never lodged a report when others went missing...the reason he is interested in Eric Chia could only be political...to discredit the government for allegedly protecting Eric Chia," he said in answer to questions raised by opposition leader Lim Kit Siang (DAP-Tanjung) and Karpal Singh during the debate on the Seventh Malaysia Plan (7MP).

Karpal Singh has interjected while Lim was debating the 7MP to ask Dr Mahathir, who is Home Minister, on whether Chia is in the country.

Earlier, Lim said that the people must be suspicious as to why the Prime Minister was still so protective of Chia when he should be more concerned over misappropriation and mismanagement behind the Perwaja financial scandal.

Dr Mahathir said that he upholds the principle that a person is innocent until proven guilty and this applies even to members of the opposition.

However, if there were evidence pointing to a person's guilt, action would be taken to arrest him.

"It does not matter whether there are my friends or my children...but before he is found guilty I am not prepared to taunt him through publicity," he said.

He said it was the way of the opposition since they did not know any other way but to make accusations by taking advantage of parliamentary immunity.

At one juncture, the situation was tense when Karpal Singh refused to withdraw his allegation that Chia may be at the Prime Minister's house because he was a close friend.

Datuk Dr Jamaluddin Jarjis (BN-Rompin) had raised his objections to Deputy Speaker Juhar Mahiruddin over Karpal Singh's remarks under the house's standing order.

Karpal Singh initially refused to do so by saying that Dr Mahathir himself had not objected to the statement. He later did so when repeatedly told by Juhar to do so.

When commenting on an allegation by Lim that there had been political intervention in cases brought to court, Dr Mahathir asked Lim whether he was accusing him of being in control of the court since it appeared that Lim did not agree with the decision of the court and the decision of the Public Prosecutor and others whereas it was the country's system.

"If he disagrees with that system, what system is he adopting...does he want the prosecution to be conducted by the opposition," he said.

Lim had also at one stage said that the opposition understood the

parliamentary and democratic system ala-Mahathir or the Umno democratic system which disallows contests.

To this, Dr Mahathir said: "In Umno there are already five presidents whereas in the DAP there has only been one secretary-general and this will be retained until his death and when he dies he already has a son to take over from him. This is not a democratic system but a feudal system...the Lim dynasty."

"In Umno we have an election...to decide whether or to contest, we go down to the members...when they say that we should not contest, we will not contest but in the DAP members are never consulted," he said.

He said that Lim's antics in offering to resign was just a show.

Dr Mahathir also questioned the reason for Karpal Singh lodging a police report on Chia's disappearance as such reports are usually made by the missing person's loved ones.

On another allegation by Karpal Singh that he did not have the power to arrest, the Prime Minister said that he does not do the arresting himself but merely sign an order, if need be, for a person's arrest.

Karpal Singh had then said that the power to arrest and the power to order a person to be detained were different.

The Dewan will sit again tomorrow. -- BERNAMA

AFY RM