

07 SEP 1997

Mahathir-Harakah

GOVT PROHIBITS STREET SALE OF HARAKAH

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 7 (Bernama) -- Street sale of Harakah, the official organ of the opposition Pas, has been prohibited, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad announced today.

Vendors hawking the tabloid face prosecution, said Dr Mahathir who is also Home Minister.

The public sale ban also that meant Harakah would be taken to court if found slandering the government and Umno, he said.

When winding-up debate at the end of the three-day 1997 Umno general assembly, here, Dr Mahathir, who is Umno president, acknowledged that all this while the government had tolerated public sale of the tabloid.

Harakah was in fact illegally sold to the public, he said.

"We don't allow party or club newspapers to be sold in the open market. ... we find that the lies that Harakah spreads are terrible, although they have no effect on us they are very slanderous all the same," he said.

During debate yesterday, a Kelantan delegate to the assembly Zaleha Hussin asked the government to ban public sale of Harakah for instigating confrontation between the Prime Minister and ulamas.

Umno Youth chief Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi also backed Zaleha's proposal saying the tabloid's content had only damaged Islam's image and did not give a true picture of the religion.

Ahmad Zahid said news-vendors were selling Harakah although the Home Ministry's permit limits its circulation only to among Pas members.

The fortnightly tabloid, priced at RM 1 a copy, is published by the PAS' central information and research department.

Among other things, it features current local and foreign news, PAS' activities and a column by party deputy president Abdul Hadi Awang.

Speaking to reporters after the assembly adjourned, Dr Mahathir said he would instruct the Home Ministry to enforce the Harakah street sale ban at the soonest.

Asked how the street sale ban be enforced in PAS-controlled Kelantan, Dr Mahathir said such tasks are handled nation-wide by federal agencies.

On whether the street sale ban also covered dissemination of Harakah's content through the Internet, he said the government could not prevent that just as it could not censor other Internet contents.

Harakah's publication permit, which allows limited circulation to PAS members, also meant that the government could not stop their subscriptions, the prime minister added. -- BERNAMA

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