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Mahathir-Kelantan

MAHATHIR:FEDERAL GOVT HAS NO PROBLEM WORKING WITH PAS

KOTA BAHARU, April 4 (Bernama) -- The Federal Government has no problem working together with the PAS-controlled Kelantan government in bringing about economic development to the state, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Federal Government had always been pragmatic in this respect and could adapt its approach to prevailing situations, he told a news conference here at the end of a one-day working visit to Kelantan.

While acknowledging that his visit this time around was in a more friendly atmosphere, Dr Mahathir however said this did not mean the federal government was giving the PAS government a "blank cheque".

"We'll befriend those who take us as friends. Likewise if we're treated as enemies, we can be enemies and if people want to shoot us, we too can shoot back," he said.

Unlike his previous visits to the state, the prime minister was for the first time accompanied throughout his tight itinerary here by Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat.

Dr Mahathir said the Federal Government would support any development project that was good for Kelantan and the people.

Asked on notions that investors were shying away from Kelantan for fear of being blacklisted as the state is not run by a Barisan Nasional party, the prime minister said: "There is no need to blacklist. It's up to the investor."

"What we want is, if they (investors) support Barisan Nasional, show it and don't do something that can put the party at a disadvantage," said Dr Mahathir who held a 90-minute long closed-door meeting with more than 100 Kelantan-born corporate leaders and senior federal officers prior to the news conference.

To another question, Dr Mahathir replied that his visit to Kelantan could be interpreted as giving a "high morale booster" to the PAS government which in turn acknowledged the importance of the Federal Government's role in developing the state economy.

" This provides a balance between the Federal and state government. State and Federal government ties are not for anyone to score points, " he said.

Asked whether Umno has no choice but to cooperate with PAS since the Umno-led Federal Government may not be able to regain Kelantan in elections, Dr Mahathir said: " The other way is also true. PAS cannot progress without Umno. That's why I say no political gain for anybody."

The prime minister also acknowledged that Malaysia needed an opposition to check the government.

"But then, we believe it shouldn't be to the extent that some people make baseless allegations that Umno is unIslamic. That's being more than an opposition. We can oppose from the point of a better administrative system or who is better in developing the country," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Kelantan's slow pace in development was not solely a question of leadership but of whether the Kelantanese wanted accelerated development or otherwise.

" This is a question of the environment in a society. If the environment does not permit effective leadership, then we will not achieve success," he said.

"Leaders are not the only ones responsible...even a clever leader will

not succeed in an environment which does not permit him to succeed," he said.

The prime minister said now it seemed that the Kelantan government wanted to maintain good relations with the Federal Government.

The Federal Government would not reject this overture, he said.

Dr Mahathir advised Kelantanese to focus on development so as to catch up with more advanced states in the country.

Asked on the possibility of PAS and Umno uniting in the future, he said: "It is possible, years back we have PAS in Barisan Nasional. Nothing is impossible in politics.

"Most of the people in Barisan Nasional today were our former enemies. People like Gerakan, PBDS...on the other hand those who are our friends leave and become our enemies," he said.

The prime minister was also asked why there was disunity among Muslims in the country while he had often appealed on international fora for Islamic nations to unite, Dr Mahathir said Muslim unity in fact did not exist in any Muslim state.

"There is no unity of the Ummah in any country....not only among nations but within the nations themselves," he said.

He said several Islamic countries only talked of Islamic brotherhood but did not practise what they preached.

After the news conference at KUB chairman Datuk Hassan Harun's residence, Dr Mahathir, accompanied by his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, had an audience with the Sultan of Kelantan at Istana Mahkota here for about an hour before leaving for Kuala Lumpur.

The audience was off-limit to members of the media including photographers and television crews.-- BERNAMA

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