

22 FEB 1997

Mahathir-Students

STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN CRIMINAL ACTIVITIES SERIOUS, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 22 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the problem of student involvement in criminal activities, including drug trafficking and abuse, is "very serious" and society can no longer hide it.

The prime minister said this unhealthy trend must be exposed, otherwise it would spread.

"I feel that if it has reached a stage where schoolchildren are involved, it is serious, very serious," he said,

"That is why we speak of the matter openly. Until now, most of us want to hide (it). We do not want to show our ugly side," he told reporters at a Hari Raya and Chinese New Year gathering organised by the Prime Minister's Department, here.

Dr Mahathir was asked to comment on the recent arrests of students suspected of involvement in secret society activities and drug trafficking and abuse. This week alone, police in Johor, Pahang and Melaka were reported to have detained 95 students, including girls, for such activities.

The prime minister also said that police need not take extreme measures like handcuffing the suspected students.

They should use their discretion in some cases like when detaining the students although he realised that it was normal police practice to handcuff suspects, he said.

However, Dr Mahathir, who is also Home Minister, said this did not mean that action would not be taken against the students involved.

"I feel that action must be taken against these children (students involved in crime) but maybe there is no need to handcuff them, just bring them in.

"But it is also not good if we hide too much," he said.

Dr Mahathir said society must take a stand whether to leave the students to their criminal activities or to act to stop the scourge from spreading.

"If we do not act, I believe that soon our own children will be involved in drugs," he said.

He said that if the matter was kept under wraps the students concerned would think that the public did not know of their offences.

"So people must know...we must not overly protect (them). If we protect them, they will feel that they can do anything," he added.

Asked whether the students' actions could be monitored to keep them away from crime, he said the government was unable to do so because there were too many students and there were other cases like loitering, bohsia and environmental pollution to handle.

Hence, he said, all parties -- the government, teachers, school principals, parents and the public -- should jointly bear the responsibility in tackling the problem.

Asked whether a committee at the highest level should be set up to tackle the problem, he said it was already in existence.

Dr Mahathir and his wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed later attend the open house of the Bukit Bintang Umno division where the prime minister presented Hari Raya gifts to several old people in Federal Territory. -- BERNAMA

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