

21 JUL 1998

Mahathir - economy

DON'T CONDEMN INDONESIA, CHINESE DAILIES AND DAP TOLD

SEREMBAN, July 21 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has advised local Chinese-language newspapers and the opposition DAP not to use the country to condemn Indonesia for the riots which erupted after the economic crisis hit the republic recently.

"This is not the way for us to help the people in Indonesia," he said addressing party leaders of the governing Barisan Nasional coalition, community chiefs, heads of organisation and senior government officials at a gathering at the municipal hall here.

The function was the last on the prime minister's itinerary for his one-day working visit to Negeri Sembilan today.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Barisan Nasional chairman, said an ideal way to help the Indonesians would be to persuade them to initiate a wealth distribution mechanism for all the republic's ethnic groups.

"I appeal to Chinese newspapers and the DAP not to use Malaysia to condemn Indonesia for its internal problem. This is not good," the prime minister said.

Dr Mahathir said the rioting and looting of Chinese-owned shops in Indonesia occurred because most of the business were in the hands of the Chinese and Indonesia lacked a policy like Malaysia's New Economic Policy (NEP) of wealth-sharing between indigenous and non-indigenous Indonesians.

"I'm quite worried that in Malaysia there are efforts by the Chinese newspapers and the DAP to condemn Indonesia for the riots which destroyed many Chinese-owned shops," he said.

Dr Mahathir said because business in Indonesia was controlled by the Chinese, indigenous Indonesians not having enough money to buy goods resorted to rioting and looted Chinese-owned shops.

He said Indonesia has been severely impoverished leaving 24 million people jobless because of the currency crisis triggered off by currency traders.

The prime minister reminded Malaysians that they too would have to be wary so as not "to be swept away by the currents".

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia would not see such rioting because the government had rectified the imbalances by introducing the NEP.

The prime minister said Malaysia had extended various sorts of assistance including financial aid and medical supplies to help alleviate the sufferings of the Indonesians while currency traders chose to totally ignore their hardships.

Dr Mahathir also said the understanding and cooperation between the government and the people had enabled the country overcome various problems.

He said the racial riots of 1969 had taught the nation to promulgate policies that could nurture inter-racial cooperation and minimise racial differences.

Malaysia, he said, was now being regarded as the more advanced among developing countries and looked upon by many third world countries as a model of how a backward country could improve itself.

"This is because the government gets strong support from the people... we can determine the policies that can make us progressive," he said.

He said the current economic crisis following the ringgit's depreciation was caused by currency traders and not the government as claimed by the foreign media which accused it of lacking transparency,

corruption and nepotism.

"If the government is no good, things would have gone bad a long time ago. How come things suddenly turn bad, why has the ringgit not fall a long time ago," he said.

Dr Mahathir added that the nation, however, still persevered and could take care of itself as Malaysians have become wiser and understood the situation.

-- BERNAMA

AZ RP rn