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Mahathir-demonstrations

DR MAHATHIR AGAIN RULES OUT SNAP ELECTION

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 21 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad reiterated today that he will not be pressured into calling for an early election by supporters of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

"I do not see why I should be pushed into an earlier election because that will have the effect of undermining our economic programmes," the Prime Minister said at a media conference here.

He was asked if he would call for an election to settle all issues "once and for all" as supporters of the sacked Deputy Prime Minister had been holding street demonstrations and had even urged the Yang di-Pertuan Agong to dissolve Parliament to allow for an election to be held.

Dr Mahathir said that it would seem that the attempt to bring down the government through continuous demonstrations was going on and would go on.

"We are quite prepared that when the time comes for election, anybody can contest and if they win, they win, if they lose, they lose, and if we win, we win, if we lose, we lose," he said.

Asked about the show of support for him by members of the public outside the Philippine Embassy here yesterday, Dr Mahathir said as much as others could express their views, those people too could also express their views.

"My worry is simply that if we make it a habit of taking to the streets, than of course this country will not be able to grow...this country has developed because of political stability."

"What would happen, for example, if both sides take to the streets and they clash, then there will be fighting," said the Prime Minister, who returned early today after a five-day visit to Japan.

"When we wanted to hold a very peaceful demonstration in the confines of a stadium, the police advised us not to and refused to give permission, we appreciate the police view point," he said.

The protesters had expressed unhappiness against the recent remarks by Philippine President Joseph Estrada who was seen as interfering in the country's internal affairs.

Asked what his advice would be to Asean leaders like Estrada, the Prime Minister said they should give the chance for the court to decide.

Anwar, who was sacked as deputy prime minister and finance minister on Sept 2 and expelled from Umno the next day, is facing 10 counts of corruption and sodomy charges. The trial is due to start on Nov 2.

Dr Mahathir also said there were attempts by foreign press and some foreigners to put the court and the government on trial rather than the trial of Anwar.

"To us this is an interference with the process of the law. Whereas Malaysians are not supposed to talk about the specific charges against Datuk Seri Anwar, the foreign press and foreigners are quite free to pass judgement on the court," he said.

"The reason why they want to come here to observe the trial is not because they are interested in whether Datuk Seri Anwar is guilty or not guilty. The reason why they want to come here is to see whether the court is guilty or not guilty of perpetrating an injustice to Datuk Seri Anwar," he added.

Because of that, he said the government would not entertain any specific group from coming to the country to have special treatment as

observers.

"Of course they can come here but they will be treated as any other person who wants to go to the court," he said.

"We are not stopping them from going to the court but we are not treating them as observers either because we find that the observers will have the effect of pressuring the court so as to try and accommodate them," he said.

The prime minister said as much as Malaysians were told not to talk about the case being tried, others too should not try to influence the court before hand.

"Maybe this is the practice in other countries but here we want the judge to function free of influence from any side, from the government side or others," he said.

He also said that former Hong Kong governor Chris Patten, who had described Anwar as the "darling of the Western people", had written an article alleging that Anwar was "beaten to a pulp".

"Well you and I know what is the state of health of Datuk Seri Anwar but certainly he has not been beaten to a pulp. This is the kind of propaganda that is being spread around the world in order to vilify the Malaysian government," he said.

Saying that the case should be left to the court, Dr Mahathir pointed out that the courts had in the past made decisions against the government.

"We have had a minister charged and sentenced to death. We didn't demonstrate. He didn't demonstrate. He accepted the court ruling," he said.

Dr Mahathir said when Russian President Boris Yeltsin dismissed the whole Russian Cabinet, there was no protest.

He said former ministers like Tan Sri Khir Johari and Tan Sri Samad Idris did not protest when they lost their Cabinet jobs.

"I myself was thrown out of Umno, I didn't protest...I didn't go round asking the newspapers, the foreign newspapers to support me," he said.

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