

25 OCT 1998

Mahathir-Riots

DR MAHATHIR CONDEMNS CITY'S VIOLENT RIOTERS

LANGKAWI, Oct 25 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today condemned those involved in yesterday's violent demonstrations in the federal capital.

He said the rioters purportedly sought to preserve the rule of law whereas they themselves were indeed the law-breakers.

"The groups calling themselves reformists seeking to uphold justice are the ones who are breaking the law," he said.

No one benefited from the incident but instead the country's image suffered, said Dr Mahathir, who is also Home Minister, when reporters approached him on the rioting after he launched a high-grade "Terus Maju" fertiliser at the Padi Museum here.

The prime minister branded the rioters cowards for using women and children as shield when staging the demonstrations.

"Don't blame the government if children are burnt during the rioting as the authorities have discovered +Molotov cocktails+ and kerosene at the scene," he said.

Dr Mahathir said there were similarities in the rioters' modus operandi yesterday and that of past demonstrations staged before former deputy prime minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim joined UMNO.

"It is similar to the student demonstrations in 1974 when I was Education Minister then," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he believed yesterday's violent rioting was master-minded by Hishamuddin Rais, a former student leader in the 1970's.

The modus operandi was to start off with peaceful demonstrations first and followed with violent rioting once the earlier method proved ineffective, he said.

"The government will not be cowed by any attempt to prevent Anwar from being tried in court," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he believed the demonstrations were meant to prevent Anwar from being tried in open court.

Anwar, who was sacked from the Cabinet on Sept 2 and expelled from Umno the next day, is currently under remand and faces 10 counts of charges of corruption and unnatural sex acts.

His trial on four counts of corrupt practices has been fixed for Nov 2.

Asked on government measures to prevent recurrence of yesterday's violent demonstrations, the prime minister urged Malaysians to reject rioting as it would not bring any good.

He said the police have all this while only used water cannon to disperse demonstrators and even so, not directly on them but just to get them wet.

Yesterday's demonstration in Kuala Lumpur turned violent when rioters assaulted and injured two policemen - a traffic cop at the Kampung Baru mosque and an inspector in Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman.

They assembled at the mosque after Maghrib prayers, many carrying pro-Anwar leaflets and banners.

They threw stones, bottles, wooden and steel rods at police which also damaged several vehicles parked nearby.

Police later arrested 241 of them in Tuanku Abdul Rahman and in Kampung Baru.

-- BERNAMA

JM rn

