

07 AUG 1998

Mahathir - Internet

INTERNET USED TO CREATE CHAOS IN M'SIA, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 8 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said certain elements are out to create chaos in the country using the Internet.

In this connection he advised the people not to be easily influenced by what they read on the Internet of prediction of imminent troubles in the country.

Dr Mahathir, who is Umno president, was responding to a question raised during a press conference after chairing a monthly meeting of the party's Supreme Council at the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC) here last night.

"I reckon these (lies through the Internet) will be spread more often... there are irresponsible people who are bent on sparking off chaos and create problems in the country," he said.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Home Minister, described Malaysians engaged in such activities as traitors.

He was asked about rumours being spread through the Internet of impending riots taking place in Chow Kit, the capital city's popular shopping district and of clashes between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Dr Mahathir said there were parties who deliberately painted a negative image of Islam with a motive to pit Muslims against non-Muslims in the country.

According to him, the people behind this campaign were those who called themselves missionaries, lecturers and ulamas (religious scholars).

"There are also those without Islamic education and trained in other disciplines who try to paint a bad picture of Islam by disseminating information in English through the Internet which tend to make others fear Islam," he said.

Dr Mahathir cited writings on the Internet which only emphasised the death penalty for certain offenders.

He said last night's council meeting discussed Islam-related issues, among other things, and resolved to explain to Malaysians the true teachings of Islam.

The prime minister urged the people not to be taken in by preposterous tales on the Internet or told during religious talks.

"Don't believe all those absurd stories of dead men turning into pigs. If Muslims can accept this, I believe they don't really understand about Islam and about human nature," he said.

He said despite the government maintaining that those spreading such yarns were liars, some were still inclined to believe the lies.

Asked how the government would deal with lecturers conducting religious talks, Dr Mahathir said state governments would be directed to only allow lecturers with credentials to be involved in such activity.

On how the government would deal with rumours spread through the Internet, Dr Mahathir said: "This is the problem we're facing now that the Internet is being used to circulate poison-pen letters."

So far, he said, the government has not been able to trace those involved.

"But this is the freedom that the West has been glorifying about which they look upon as a human right to create anarchy in their society. They enjoy watching such people abuse the Internet to exacerbate the situation in the country," he said.

He said such people used the Internet to incite one side against the

other by reporting about conflicts among them.

Asked whether there was already a method of tracing such irresponsible people through the Internet itself, he said: "So far we have yet to think of a way."

On whether the government should create an agency to monitor Internet abuse, he said: "We're actually thinking of it. In fact we're studying what is being put onto the Internet ... it's quite easy with those having addresses but those without, it will be quite difficult."

On how long more could the Internet abuse be tolerated, he said: "What can we do, we can do nothing right now, if we can, we do it right now. If I could, I would want to arrest the persons concerned and bring them to the open and flog them."

Asked about today's rumours of people hoarding essential items, the prime minister did not rule out the possibility of this happening more often so long as there were inciters out to create trouble.

"These people are traitors," he said.

Dr Mahathir also dismissed talk of Indonesian immigrants in the country arming themselves up and getting ready to riot after Aug 15, after which the work permits of many of them would no longer be valid.

He said: "These are all lies. We have no information of them picking up weapons.

"The rumour-mongers are only out to create disturbance in the country, just like the people who called out fire or the boy who called out wolf."

Asked whether the rumour-mongers were from within or outside the country, Dr Mahathir said the government could not ascertain this.

"This is the beauty of the Internet," he added.

-- BERNAMA

Team/ara rn