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Mahathir-ISA

ISA STILL NEEDED TO SAFEGUARD NATIONAL INTEREST, SAYS MAHATHIR

SHAH ALAM, Oct 14 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today he once proposed the abolition of the Internal Security Act (ISA) but the police felt it was still needed in the interest of national security.

He said they felt "we have not reached a stage" where national security could be safeguarded without such law.

Dr Mahathir said the action of certain groups to start disorder through demonstrations especially in the federal capital and the effect of foreign media coverage on the people showed that ISA was still needed to safeguard public order and national security.

"We have seen this today how certain quarters in the country were trying to start chaos. To them, these were just demonstrations but to the people, their livelihood has been threatened," he told a news conference after opening the national level Unity Day '98, here.

"If there are riots, business cannot go on. The foreign media show pictures as though we are having riots all day long, every day, scaring the tourists," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that as the result of all this the hotel industry was having problem with tourist arrivals declining by 25 per cent.

"It's easier for these people, they come out and demonstrate but the effect is on other people. It is for this reason that we need a law to prevent such demonstration," he said.

"We want to abolish ISA but the people must understand that they should not break the law. Its their continous defiance that led to law like ISA," he said.

The Prime Minister said in developed countries, there were no riots and so they did not need such law.

"But when faced with riots, they would introduce similar law," he said.

"I believe, in Britain, when a group is suspected to be involved with violence or terrorism, they would be detained without trial. No crime has been committed yet but the measure is preventive," he said, adding that ISA is also a preventive measure.

Asked why did he propose to abolish ISA, Dr Mahathir said: "I thought we've achieved peace...Malaysians have matured and will not resort to bad ways but observe the laws."

He said anyone who was unhappy with the government could change the government during the elections.

"Unhappy with the government, we topple the government, unhappy with the law, we elect others who will see that the laws including ISA be abolished," he said.

"We have never hide the fact that we support ISA. Even during the election we told the people we support ISA, they still elected us," he said.

-- BERNAMA

AZH ABG