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Mahathir-Strength

MALAYSIA'S REAL STRENGTH IS WITH THE PEOPLE, SAYS DR M

KUALA KANGSAR, Nov 22 (Bernama) -- Malaysia's real strength is in the hands of the ordinary people who express their stand during the general election and not with street protesters, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said this when commenting on the response by Malaysians from all walks of life who chided US Vice-President Al Gore for supporting the anti-government reform movement during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) Summit which ended on Wednesday.

"They voiced their stand because they were disappointed and humiliated by his disrespectful remarks," he told reporters after visiting the Mariwasa Kraftangan Sdn Bhd factory here.

"I'm impressed by their stand as this is the real strength of the country," he said.

Al Gore, who represented US President Bill Clinton at the summit, praised the supporters of the reform movement, saying "they are the brave people of Malaysia.

He expressed his support openly when addressing the Apec Business Advisory Council (Abac) dinner at the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC) on Monday night.

Gore is regarded to have interfered not only in Malaysia's domestic affairs but had shown his arrogance by leaving the function immediately after delivering his speech without attending the dinner hosted by Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir commended the people for speaking up against Gore's offensive remarks and disgusting attitude.

"Although they (those who spoke against Gore) were not interested in politics, they know what are their needs," he said.

Dr Mahathir was also asked on the Information Ministry-initiated "Cetusan Perasaan" programme (outpouring of feelings) to be launched next week to enable Malaysians to express their opinions on current issues particularly on Gore's speech.

"I feel many ordinary people, "the so-called silent majority" want to state their stance. They are more than the activists who want to do the same," he said.

On the possibility that the views expressed could be dissenting views or grievances, Dr Mahathir said the government had often listen to such views.

He said the foreign media had often criticised the local media of being controlled by the government to the extent that people with opposing views could not voice their criticisms.

"On the contrary, the foreign media deny us the rights to air our views. That's why we see the foreign media reports were suited to their needs.

"They have a certain agenda. They silence or censor us to the extent that we cannot talk anything," he said.

Asked on his briefing to the Barisan Nasional (BN) Youth at a closed-door meeting here today, Dr Mahathir said he briefed them on the latest moves by anti-government groups instilling hatred among the people to get support.

"I was told they have reached a stage where they show my pictures to children and tell them "people like this must be beheaded."

"They are teaching children to hate people. Although they are doing it to me which I don't take seriously, they are poisoning the minds of the children who are immature and could be easily influenced by their parents and teachers to their wishes," he said.

Dr Mahathir said although the government strived to nurture noble cultures among the people, some people ignored them as they were prevented by certain groups not to listen.

"But we will continue to try to expand such cultures," he added.

-- BERNAMA

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