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Mahathir-politics

NATION MAY LOSE FREEDOM FOR EXPOSING INTERNAL PROBLEMS

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 14 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he is worried that Malaysia will lose her freedom if a handful of Malaysians keep exposing the country's internal problems to foreigners and invite them to interfere.

He said if such citizens continued to do so, it is the foreigners who would determine who should lead Malaysia and be given priority.

Dr Mahathir said this in an exclusive interview with Bernama TV when asked to make a comparison between the political crisis he faced in 1987 and the current one.

In 1987, Dr Mahathir, who was challenged as president of UMNO, had nearly lost while nearly half the Cabinet members left the party and Umno itself was subsequently declared unlawful.

Turmoil hit Malaysian politics again this time around following Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's expulsion from the government and Umno at a time the country was still steering her way out of an economic downturn.

Reflecting on the events of 1987, Dr Mahathir said: "At that time we felt it was terrible, because of the possibility of the party splitting into two.

"In actual fact, the party did break up. Although I managed to pull back the majority, nearly half the party members left to join Parti Semangat 46.

"This time, except for scores of people who do not hold important posts in the party, the others give me full support. The Menteri Besar, Cabinet ministers, deputy ministers ... all of them have given their fullest support. In fact, it was they who decided on the action that we have taken."

Asked how he was coping with the economic crisis now compounded by a political one, Dr Mahathir said he could still manage it.

"I think with the help of my colleagues and all that ... they are very supportive. All the members of Cabinet, all the members of the (UMNO) party are very supportive. I know I can fall back on them and that increases my capacity to work.

Asked whether the current problems are not as difficult as those before, Dr Mahathir said he did not deny that the present ones are just as difficult.

"What with the foreigners beginning to interfere. These people (supporters of Anwar) are getting support from foreigners who do not know the real situation.

"In 1987, there was no foreign interference. We do not seem to be a free and independent country anymore.

"Our internal problems are exposed to others.

"I am worried that if we continue to do so, our freedom will be lost.

"Other people will determine who will be our leaders, who should be given priority, etc."

Asked about certain quarters who are bent on seeing Malaysia being strife-torn like other neighbouring countries, Dr Mahathir said their hope was actually to have large-scale riots nation-wide.

"With that, the government would fall, and when the government falls, there will be no trials. And when there are no trials, sensitive matters will not be exposed.

"Therefore, when the government doesn't fall and court cases are heard,

the hopes of these people are not fulfilled."

On the possibility of certain groups taking opportunity of next week's Apec Summit to portray Malaysia as undemocratic, the prime minister said if the foreign observers were to really study the situation, they would find that the present government has been legitimately chosen by the people in a valid election.

On the other hand, the method that was being employed to bring down the government was not through the people exercising their choice but through violence.

For example by fighting the police, starting fires and desecrating mosques.

"This is undemocratic. If these people are really democratic, they will not resort to such actions," said the prime minister.

"Those people from foreign countries who claim to champion democracy, they should know that the method being used to topple this government is not democratic.

"On the contrary, this government was formed through a democratic process," he said.

Asked why, of late, Malaysia has been getting such a bad press from the foreign media, Dr Mahathir said perhaps Malaysia was too outspoken.

"We like to call a spade a spade. They (foreigners) are used to not being criticised but to criticising others. So, when they get a dose of the same medicine, they cannot take it, particularly as expressed through the media.

"So, they go all out because we think quite openly that the media is wrong. And their system is wrong and their financial regime is wrong.

"They don't like to be told that they are wrong. They like to tell others that others are wrong. For example, they blamed our government for whatever happened.

"But when we blamed them, they don't like to hear that. So, we are not the darlings of these people.

He agreed that the international media has been most unfair to Malaysia.

-- BERNAMA

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