

25/09/1998

Police had to act, says PM

DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday defended the police for their stern action against supporters of dismissed Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim who had organised illegal rallies.

The Prime Minister said the police had to take such action because the situation had become unruly and if left unchecked, might lead to racial riots.

"... we have a problem here because people of different races might fight each other if we allow that kind of rally which is meant to incite violence," he told newsmen after chairing the National Information Technology Council meeting in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

"Being responsible, we have to stop the riots. If we allow such action to continue, this would aggravate, perhaps to looting, thefts and even raping, and then the government will be considered irresponsible.

"They (Anwar's supporters) know that if they resist violently, we also have to put a certain amount of violent," he said, adding the foreign news agencies would certainly like to show how the local policemen acted violently and the pictures taken will be repeatedly aired by their television networks.

All these, he said, were to give the impression that Asians, particularly Malaysians, cannot run the country and should hand back the running of the country to their colonial masters.

Dr Mahathir also reminded that the ban on public rallies has long been existence in Malaysia.

"There has always been a ban in this country. It is not only now. Thus, when Anwar held rallies in his house and elsewhere, he is actually breaking the law.

On CNBC's broadcast of Anwar's video tape which alleged that the Prime Minister is corrupted and involved in political conspiracy and cronyism, Dr Mahathir said the US television network can spread whatever lies to the whole world.

"You are free to air this (tape) every half an hour because you own the media and can tell lies and influence the whole world against us.

"That is the right of the media. What rights I have, of course, is of no interest to you," he added.

Asked whether there is truth to the content of the tape aired by CNBC, Dr Mahathir said: "This is freedom of speech, which includes freedom to tell lies. We accept that."

On the fate of Umno Youth Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, who was arrested under the Internal Security Act on Monday for his involvement in illegal rallies, Dr Mahathir said the party's supreme council will discuss the matter soon.

"Since the youth movement has submitted a memorandum on a vote of no confidence against the Umno Youth chief, the supreme council members will have to take this into consideration.

"It is up to the supreme council to decide," he said, adding the Government will also have to review Ahmad Zahid's position as Bank Simpanan Nasional chairman.

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