

27/06/1998

PM: Don't fall for foreign ploy (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today advised students not to fall prey to foreign attempts to topple the Government which they have accused of practising nepotism and cronyism.

He said they must be able to differentiate between the truth and lies.

Speaking off the cuff for over 75 minutes, he said talk of nepotism, cronyism and favouritism had been turned into a political issue to undermine the country's leadership.

"Do not be easily influenced and taken in by these terms before having a full understanding of them. If you are to act blindly when incited by people with their own agenda, we will eventually be the victims," he told a seminar attended by some 300 student leaders from local institutions of higher learning at Pusat Islam.

The three-day event was organised by the Deputy Vice-Chancellors (Students' Affairs) Secretariat and Biro Tatanegara.

Saying that nepotism and crony capitalism did not exist in the country, Dr Mahathir said the people championing the issue were supported by foreigners frustrated by the Government's ability to withstand efforts to re-colonise the country through economic means.

"Those who raised the issue of nepotism were praised by the Western media whereas they themselves were like others or even worse, enjoying the benefits from government privatisation projects and allocation of shares."

Dr Mahathir said the Government gave priority to one's capability before it awarded projects.

"We have no problem in giving out two, four or 10 projects if they are qualified.

"But we can't give someone who is only good at fanning the satay to build, for example, the Bakun dam.

"This is not discrimination. He will only destroy it if given the task."

The Prime Minister said as foreign elements had failed to impose their wishes on the country by way of wrecking the economy, they had tried to do it through a change of leadership.

"They need a reason so that the people will rise and oppose the Government. So they created the nepotism, cronyism and corruption issue which I believe have influenced many of us."

He said those championing the issue did so for their own benefit rather than to improve things.

Calling on the students not to compare Malaysia with Indonesia, Dr Mahathir said:

"Reforms there have nothing to do with us as they are aimed at eliminating nepotism and cronyism. Ours is to change the thinking and on values."

Dr Mahathir stressed that he did not intend to speak on nepotism in Indonesia but felt compelled to do so as many had the impression that because nepotism was rife in Indonesia, the situation in Malaysia could not have been much different.

"It is not nice to say bad things about others but we have to do it because there are attempts to discredit us," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the people must be able to see the bad and good and not be instigated by certain elements bent on destroying the country.

"Before raising a gun to shoot someone, make sure that the person is really the intended target."

He reminded the audience that Malaysia was still free and did not have to submit to conditions of the International Monetary Fund but this could change in the future if there was chaos like students here wanting to emulate the action of their counterparts in Indonesia.

\* PICTURE ON P2

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