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Reformasi group `can form a party'

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who had thrown a challenge to the reformasi movement to stand for elections, said today the Government would approve their application to set up a party, if there was one.

He said standing for the election was far better than resorting to violent street demonstrations which put many people in hardship.

Dr Mahathir was speaking to reporters after launching the maiden delivery of the Malaysia-made SME MD3-160 aircraft, ordered by the United States.

The launch was held at SME Aviation in Subang.

He was asked to comment on a statement by former Pas Youth secretary Abdul Malek Hussin, who was released unconditionally last week after being detained for 58 days under the Internal Security Act, that the reformasi movement might be registered as a political party and might take part in elections.

Dr Mahathir, when asked whether the application by the movement to set up a political party would be approved, said:

"No problem as long as they do it (the application procedure) properly. If they want a political party, they can have a political party. If they dare, that is."

Asked whether he was throwing another challenge at them, Dr Mahathir said: "No, these people are cowards. When they are together in large numbers, they dare to do things, but when they are alone, they keep quiet."

In Kota Kinabalu last Friday, Dr Mahathir said members of the reformasi movement should stand for elections if they wanted to change the leadership.

"All we (BN members) need is a healthy mind. We don't need to wear a headband, go to the streets and shout, burn motorcycles and throw Molotov cocktails.

"By using our heads, we can ensure who becomes our leader," he had said.

Today, the Prime Minister said if members of the reformasi movement wanted to abuse the leaders as they were doing now, they could do so at their election campaigns.

"I am used to being cursed by them anywhere," he said.

Dr Mahathir said some Umno members might join the reformasi movement because they could no longer benefit from the party.

"These are hardly Umno members. They are just passing through. These are the people who joined the party with the impression that joining Umno would be profitable because they can secure contracts and other benefits.

"But these days, the person who gave these contracts is no longer there, so they see no reason to remain in Umno," he said.

Dr Mahathir said previously, people had joined Umno to uphold the interests of the race, religion and the country.

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