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We won't declare state of emergency, Dr M tells editors

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad told Chinese newspaper editors yesterday that the Government would not declare a state of emergency as the country was still peaceful.

He said while there were demonstrations every weekend by sacked Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's supporters, the police would take stern action in dealing with them.

Speaking to the editors at the Prime Minister's Department, Dr Mahathir said he did not wish to see violence in the country and added that the Chinese community should continue to support the present Government.

Dr Mahathir gave the interview to Nanyang Siang Pau, Sin Chew Jit Poh, China Press, Kwong Ming and Kwong Wah.

Nanyang Siang Pau's headline on page one was "Anwar's case will affect elections", with the interview running into page two and three.

Sin Chew Jit Poh's headline on page one was "Dr Mahathir says extremist power may occur if Umno's power declines and this is not good for the country". The story was also carried in page three.

China Press' page one headline was "Do not declare emergency", with the interview continued on page two and three.

Dr Mahathir said the Anwar issue was not just a Malay or Umno issue but a national issue.

Dr Mahathir said if a leader who was not suitable to be Prime Minister became one, the Chinese community would also be affected, and as such the community should support the Government.

On his views about the Chinese newspapers' coverage of the Anwar issue, Dr Mahathir said too much prominence was given to the matter.

He advised the Chinese papers to report positively and support the Government.

Dr Mahathir said the purpose of the demonstrations was to destroy the strength of Umno.

"Jikalau kekuatan Umno dihancurkan, kerajaan juga akan jatuh. Itulah matlamat mereka (If Umno becomes weak, the Government will fall. That's their intention)," he said.

Dr Mahathir said participants in the demonstrations included Islamic extremists and other extremists.

He said in the next general election the Barisan Nasional could still command a two-third majority.

Dr Mahathir said the BN still had time to explain to the people about the Anwar issue and more people would accept this.

He said on political and economic matters, he had no quarrels with Anwar and had still treated him as his successor, and that the sacking of Anwar was totally on moral grounds as Anwar was a leader who was not suitable for the community.

On Apec, Dr Mahathir said he would raise the issue of exchange rate controls to limit the trading of currencies.

He said that he had raised the issue in Vancouver but there had been no response.

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