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Dr Mahathir receives warm welcome in Permatang Pauh

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BUKIT MERTAJAM, Thurs. - The Prime Minister received a warm welcome today when he visited Permatang Pauh for the first time since the sacking of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim as Deputy Prime Minister.

Anwar has been Member of Parliament for the constituency since 1982.

Despite the thunderstorm that drenched the field of Sekolah Menengah Guar Perahu where Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad spoke, the crowd huddled in big groups sheltered only by the umbrellas they hoisted and the raincoats they wore.

But although the crowd knew the significance of his presence, not once did Dr Mahathir make any reference to or mention Anwar. Anwar was former Permatang Pauh Umno division chief.

However, he didn't mince his words when he criticised the Opposition parties - DAP, Pas and Parti Keadilan Nasional in particular - for undermining national interest by seeking foreign support in their bid to topple the Barisan Nasional Government.

"The Opposition parties worship the foreigners so much, even when a certain Vice-President of a foreign power encouraged the people to riot," he said. "If the Opposition forms the Government, they will surrender everything to the foreign powers."

Also present were Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Penang Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon, Information Minister Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob, Penang State Executive Council members and State Barisan component party leaders.

Dr Mahathir gave his pledge that while the Barisan Nasional was in power, the country would never bow to foreign interests, even if it meant enduring some suffering.

"We do not need the foreign powers to tell us 'you are a good boy'," he said. "What do they care if our country is destroyed?"

Despite his strong criticisms against the foreign powers, Dr Mahathir acknowledged there were good foreigners who came to Malaysia for long-term investments, built factories that provided jobs and earned handsome profits.

What the country did not need were the rogue speculators who dabbled in the stock and currency markets for destructive short-term gains, he said.

"We welcome their investments, not their political interference.

"We also don't need their money to buy our shares. We have adequate funds.

"PNB (Permodalan Nasional Bhd) has enough money to buy shares for Bumiputeras and Malays."

On that accord, Dr Mahathir expressed his appreciation for the multi-national companies that invested in Penang, citing computer chip maker Intel as a good example.

He also used the occasion to underscore issues that have been the theme of his earlier speeches, particularly on how Indonesia was forced to give away a good measure of its sovereignty when it agreed to the International Monetary Fund's bailout.

"If we had been forced to do the same and submit to their conditions we would have lost our hard-earned independence and the good things that came with the National Economic Policy would have been undermined."

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