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Mahathir-Anwar

DR MAHATHIR UNPERTURBED BY EROSION OF UMNO SUPPORT BY ANWAR

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 16 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he is not worried whether Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim can erode the support for Umno or otherwise.

The Umno president and Barisan Nasional (BN) chairman said what he was worried about was that the former deputy prime minister had created crisis in the country.

"This has been the history ever since 1974 which shows that when he is frustrated and blocked, he will try to create chaos. In 1974, he lied and claimed that a child had died of starvation (in Baling) and students were then asked to demonstrate," he said in a special interview with the private television station TV3, here tonight.

Dr Mahathir was asked whether it was now Anwar's turn to erode Umno's strength just like the erosion caused by Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah when he formed Parti Melayu Semangat 46 to contest in the 1990 general election.

The transcript of the interview was released to Bernama by the Prime Minister's Office.

"Datuk Seri Anwar certainly has influence. But in 1990, it was not only Tengku Razaleigh (Hamzah) who left Umno and took along many Umno leaders but the PBS too decided to join the opposition.

"As such, our position became rather critical. Now (I) don't see that Keadilan (Parti Keadilan Nasional) will succeed in eroding Umno's strength," he said.

Keadilan is led by Anwar's wife, Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Ismail and the party has merged to form an opposition pact describing themselves as the so-called alternative front in an effort to topple the BN government in the 10th general election on Nov 29.

Anwar is serving a six-year jail term after being found guilty of abusing his position and is also being tried for sodomy.

Dr Mahathir said when Anwar was arrested in September last year, he again urged his supporters to demonstrate and destroy Umno and government properties and later claimed he was being poisoned to induce his supporters to stage demonstrations.

"I'm convinced that when he (Anwar) finds that Keadilan will fail, lose, maybe defeated 100 per cent, then in order to save himself, he will try to frustrate the general election by staging riots. And I'm convinced he will also get assistance from foreign countries," he said.

Dr Mahathir was also asked on the perception by some people that he was brushing aside the "threat" from the opposition pact.

He said, what was clear was the way the pact was cooperating which was merely based on their respective interest.

Unlike the opposition coalition, he said the BN component parties had formed a deep understanding and a strong bond, that is, to create a permanent cooperation.

He said the opposition did not have such an understanding and furthermore they had separate agendas in their struggles.

"One of their leaders was even willing to accept Lim Kit Siang (DAP secretary general) as Prime Minister just to get support although he had said himself that only an ulama can be the leader. Is Kit Siang an Ulama that they are suddenly prepared to accept Kit Siang?" Dr Mahathir said.

Asked on the joint manifesto and "2000 Budget" presented by the opposition, Dr Mahathir said the manifesto was clearly not supported even

by themselves while the budget contained empty promises made by people who knew that they would lose in the general election.

"As for the BN, we will not make promises that we cannot fulfil. We introduce the budget that we know we have the capacity (to fulfil) because we have managed the country's finances so well to the extent that even when pressured by the economic crisis we did not have to resort to borrowing, we don't have to beg from the IMF (International Monetary Fund).

"We revive our own national economy and today our economy has grown back and we know we have enough money to spend properly, not in a wild manner," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the economic recovery measures and the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) were examples how Malaysia managed to come up with its own approach in line with current development.

"So we must have ideas, an idea which is designed by us and has not been thought of by others. Such as the measures on how to ward off attacks by currency speculators.

"That's our own creation. The whole world has not tried (it) but we were prepared to try and today the world recognizes that we are capable and successful," he added.

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