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Umno-Najib

DR MAHATHIR'S MEETING WITH STUDENTS HAVE CLEARED AIR

By: Tham Choy Lin

SINGAPORE, Feb 9 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's meeting with Malaysian students in London last week had given them a better understanding of the political developments at home, said Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

"Dr Mahathir's replies to their questions have helped clarify the situation. But this has to be a process, we have to continue to talk to our students abroad," said Najib in response to criticisms by some politicians that Malaysian students have not been given a clear picture of what was happening at home.

During the meeting, a student was reported to have asked the Prime Minister to resign over the Anwar affair.

Najib said while ministers were always encouraged to brief students when they were abroad, they may not be able to meet all and students themselves want to hear only from politicians whom they have high regard for.

"Every effort is done for them to try to get the correct picture. As far as the political situation in Malaysia is concerned, it is very important for us to continue to maintain our undivided support for Dr Mahathir because he is the lynchpin in the system.

"We're grappling with major economic and political challenges in the short term. It's important that we rally around his leadership to ensure continued stability and for us to overcome some of the major problems we are facing," he said.

Najib said there would always be some students who would disagree and have negative views but it would be better to know why they were unhappy so that the issues could be addressed.

"We encourage dialogue, forums and meetings to take place and, sometimes, students can be critical. But by being critical, we can take the opportunity to assuage some of their concerns about what is happening in Malaysia," he said.

He said the Malaysian Students Department and Malaysian missions abroad would continue to play their part in keeping the students updated.

Najib also said that Umno must make the extra effort to spread the party's message and establish much more "out-reach programmes" to the younger generation to attract them to join Umno and be more committed and passionate about the Umno struggle.

"There has definitely been a change in attitude and thinking amongst younger people. Younger people expect to be much more inclusive and for us to be much more consultative in our approach," he said when asked on observations that younger generations could not identify with Umno.

This meant Umno not only have to concentrate on existing members but also venture out to meet non-government organisations, university campuses and non-political activities outside, he said.

"So that we are able to correctly communicate and connect with younger people, we have to establish the connection to be connected to them," he added.

Asked if Umno needed a facelift to boost its image, he said Umno had always been flexible and responsive to the people.

"We should be mindful that Umno is a party which holds dear to its struggle but the policies and approaches has also been flexible. We've always been responsive to the needs of people.

"From time to time, we've changed our approaches. What is important now is we should not jump to any conclusions but for us to open Umno to more discussions with those who are on the fringe.

"They are not members but potential supporters of Umno. We must reach out to them and find out what it takes for them to come on board and support Umno," Najib added.

-- BERNAMA

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