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Excitement over meeting Dr Mahathir in New York

Zainul Arifin in New York

THE last time Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was in New York, was three years ago.

Since then much social, political and economical developments have taken place in the country.

As a result, there was a general excitement over Dr Mahathir meeting with the Malaysian community in the New York area.

More than 200 people came to the standing room only event at the Malaysian Mission to the United Nations on Tuesday to hear his talk about events back home that they have followed earnestly from afar.

The Prime Minister was here to attend the United Nations General Assembly.

At the meeting, he took the opportunity to address several issues, including updating the audience on the nation's economic situation and the efforts undertaken to resolve the problems caused by the regional financial crisis.

Dr Mahathir said apart from affecting the country's riches and resources, what the financial crisis had caused was the unravelling of most of the work done in restructuring society, especially efforts to address the economic imbalance between the races.

For example, a large portion of the gains made by the Bumiputeras since the implementation of the New Economic Policy close to 30 years ago have been negated, and now the country had to do it all over again.

The Prime Minister also briefed the audience on his decision to remove his former deputy Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, an act that was necessary when he had evidence that Anwar was morally unfit to lead the nation.

Answering a question from the floor, he said, while he believed that more and more people believed that his action was right, Malaysians have the right to believe what they wanted.

For example, he believed no amount of explaining or evidence could convince staunch supporters of Anwar on the validity of his action.

On the alleged poisoning claim by Anwar, Dr Mahathir said the question would be answered soon when the results of laboratory tests done both at home and abroad were out.

If indeed Anwar was poisoned, it would be revealed in the tests done on his hair and nail samples.

Dr Mahathir also commented on the decision of the Malaysian judiciary to jail Far Eastern Economic Review's Kuala Lumpur bureau chief Murray Hiebert for contempt.

He said the courts found Hiebert guilty and subsequently sentenced him to six weeks jail.

Dr Mahathir said it was ironic that those who protested Hiebert's jailing, were rather silent when thousands were being murdered and chased out of the homes in places all over the world.

In the hour-long session, the Prime Minister also answered questions on various topics, including the protection of the environment, drug abuse and the role of Malaysians abroad.

He reminded Malaysian living abroad, especially former students who did not return, to come home. Their talents are needed back home, he said.

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