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Mahathir-Politics

FOREIGNERS SHOULD THINK TWICE BEFORE SUPPORTING THE OPPOSITION, SAYS PM

By: Amin Husaini Harun

NEW YORK, Sept 28 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has said that foreigners should think wisely before putting their weight behind the opposition in the run-up to Malaysia's general election to be held soon.

The prime minister said foreigners, including many in the United States, should have a clear understanding of the strategic options before them before deciding whom to support.

The options are, either the modernist, progressive, tolerant, liberal, tried and tested Umno-led Barisan Nasional (BN) stable coalition with a spectacular track record or a loose coalition of parties dominated by a deviationist Islamic PAS, he said.

Speaking on "Malaysia's Political and Economic Priorities Today" at the Council on Foreign Relations luncheon talk here Tuesday, the prime minister said: "I can only hope that when support is given the opposition parties, the foreign supporters know what they are doing."

He said the governing BN does not solicit foreign support but it can do without the continuous distorted reports about it.

Dr Mahathir noted that in the run-up to the 10th free general election, the level of foreign intervention had surpassed even that of the 1964 general election when Indonesia and the communists sought to abort the birth of Malaysia.

He said foreigners who sought to promote and support the opposition should be made aware of PAS, a political party with a clearly and openly stated agenda for the establishment of its particular version of an Islamic state.

The other parties in this alternative coalition, he said, were not expected to do particularly well.

The main beneficiary from the fallout of the Anwar Ibrahim's affair was not the party of his wife, the National Justice Party (Keadilan) but PAS, he said.

"PAS is the party which has most skilfully exploited the situation and gained the greatest strength.

"It is a party noted for misuing and misinterpreting Islam to its political advantage," Dr Mahathir said.

Although at times, he said, PAS has been regarded as an Islamic fundamentalist party, which it is not, because if the fundamentals of Islam are adhered to, love of peace and tolerance towards others would be the result.

The prime minister said Umno could claim itself to be the fundamentalist in the true sense as the party believes in peace and tolerance which is the true preaching of Islam.

He said PAS also has no recognisable economic policy other than to say it should be Islamic, but what it meant was not clear.

"Please understand that whilst in Malaysia there are corporations that can take on the world, whilst there are hordes of Malaysians who are eager to be in the vanguard of IT and multimedia age, there are also quite a number who believe that television sets should be thrown into the river because they are an instrument of Satan," Dr Mahathir said.

He said the BN government has three political priorities for the country today. First, to transform a population divided by ethnicity, language, religion and culture into a united nation of Malaysians; second, to ensure that Malaysia remains progressive and liberal in its outlook and

in all its policies at home and abroad; and third, to ensure that Malaysians are able to enjoy peace, harmony, stability and prosperity at all times.

Dr Mahathir said that until the Malays, Chinese, Indians, Kadazans, Ibans and others see themselves as Malaysians first and as members of their ethnic grouping second, the primary challenge would remain.

"Until all our communities live in fair and full partnership with one another, with no feeling of subordination, marginalisation or alienation, our task is not over.

"I believe that the balanced, just and equitable policies that we have adopted in every sphere -- politics, education, poverty eradication, economic development -- have helped Malaysia to achieve significant progress in building a united nation since the racial riots of May 1969," he said.

The prime minister said he has no illusions regarding the continuing challenges ahead that if Malaysians allow themselves to be misled into lending support to the wrong cause, Malaysia might yet be another Kosovo or Bosnia Herzegovina.

On the second priority, he said the BN wants to ensure that Malaysia remains progressive, tolerant and liberal in its outlook.

"I believe that we need to ensure the continuity of this outlook and the accompanying policies because Malaysia's very survival depends upon this," he said.

On the third priority, Dr Mahathir described the May 13 1969 communal riots as the "turning point" in the country's history as "our greatest peace and stability lesson was drawn from it".

Quoting Abraham Lincoln's words, "There is no grievance that is a fit object for redress by mob law," the prime minister said those words were as meaningful as ever, particularly to the young people of Malaysia today.

"The young Malaysians of today were born after May 13, 1969. They have been the great beneficiaries of the post-1969 transformations. They have no personal or deep recollection of the nightmare that their elders went through," he said.

He said the government not only tolerates dissent but also welcomes it for the right to dissent is the heart of democracy.

"But street agitation, intimidation, violence and disorder we will not countenance. Dissenters have rights but the government is also responsible for keeping peace for the majority.

"We know that the flames of racial violence, once ignited, are difficult to douse. We in Malaysia have seen the tragic events among our brothers in neighbouring Indonesia.

"Malaysia makes no apology to anyone, for being firm in maintaining law and order," Dr Mahathir said.

-- BERNAMA

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