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Groups told not to use blackmail

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said groups and organisations should not try to blackmail the Government by threatening to withdraw their support if their demands are not met.

"We want support that is unconditional. Do not put pressure on us," said the Prime Minister when asked to comment on the action by the Federation of Chinese Associations of Malaysia which submitted a list of requests as a condition for their support for the Government.

Dr Mahathir said the association was not representative of the Chinese, the majority of whom supported the Government which had done a lot for them.

He said some people and non-Governmental organisations liked to create issues when the election was round the corner, such as by threatening to withdraw their support if the Government did not want to follow their wishes.

Dr Mahathir was also asked to comment on Canada's move to seek Commonwealth condemnation of Malaysia for the jailing of Far Eastern Economic Review bureau chief Murray Hiebert for contempt of court.

"OK ... we will seek condemnation on the treatment of the Red Indians (in Canada) who are asking for their lands. They have suppressed these people for hundreds of years already and we have never condemned.

"Recently, some Malaysians were detained at an airport in Canada and subjected to many things, this also we did not protest."

On views that the 12th Commonwealth Law Conference was being used as a Malaysia-bashing forum, the Prime Minister said they could do so.

"What's important is for us to manage our affairs with wisdom and efficiency and develop our country."

Dr Mahathir was also asked to comment on the sending of peacekeepers to East Timor and whether Asean countries should be playing the leading role.

"Yes, we are of the opinion that Asean countries should send their troops and help solve the problem. But it is clear that some other countries especially Australia are keen to send theirs.

"This is their nature ... they are glad when there is an opportunity to pressure or run down their neighbours."

Asked if there was still time for Asean to assume the lead, he said this depended on other Asean countries.

"For us, we have no problem. Malaysia has given its pledge to Habibie (B.J. Habibie, Indonesian President)," he said.

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