

05 NOV 1999

Mahathir-Labels

I AM A VICTIM OF LABELLING, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 5 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that he has become a victim of labelling resorted to by the opposition to paint a negative image of him to incite the people to hate him and the government.

He said that previously, Singapore's People's Action Party (PAP) leader Lee Kuan Yew labelled him as an "ultra" or extremist to the extent that the Chinese at that time regarded all his actions as such even though they were well-intended.

"Now, it's Maha Firaun (Great Pharaoh), Maha Zalim (Great Oppressor)...don't look at the good he has done, just believe he is an oppressor, meaning that whatever he does, they are acts of oppression," he said when launching Umno's anti-defamation operation, at the Putra World Trade Centre, here.

The operation was launched following a decision of the Umno Supreme Council last month when the party found that the opposition has been spreading lies and allegations against Umno and there was a need for a large-scale campaign to counter them.

Dr Mahathir, who is Umno president, said that the use of labels was very effective and the opposition was attempting to label government members and leaders as oppressors so that they would be regarded so wherever they go.

He cited as an example, the DAP's move to label him as a dictator and when this had been ingrained in the hearts and minds of the people, it was difficult to explain to them the truth.

"When the dictator label is stuck, we can no longer make any explanation that we are actually not dictators, that our government has actually brought much benefit to our nation," he said.

The prime minister said this included physical development and Islamic development and even if the government were to show what it had done for Islam, there would still be people who would not believe that Umno was a true Islamic party in Malaysia.

Instead, he said, since PAS used Islam as its label or brand, whatever actions by PAS, even though against Islamic teachings, people would still accept them as being in line with the Islamic religion.

"Labels on anything will take on its look and colour and it is difficult for us to erase them unless we are successful in our concerted efforts to prove that such a label is not appropriate, that it is actually much different from the meaning of the label," he said.

Dr Mahathir related a funny experience of an American tourist who visited Sydney and obtained information on the city from a boat he had boarded with an Australian, from Sydney.

He said that every time the man from Sydney explained to him about the "Opera House" and the hugeness of the boat they were on, the American would say that he was not impressed as there were better ones in his own country but what the American was attracted to was the "Rolex" watch the Australian was wearing.

The man from Sydney then said that "Rolex watches are no big deal" and threw the watch into the river, to the amazement of the American, he said.

The prime minister said that little did the American know that the Rolex watch was bought in Petaling Street, here.

Dr Mahathir said that the Malays had not yet realise how vital labels

were but the Westerners and the Chinese were well-versed in this matter and clever in using them.

He said that when a brand was well-known, people would buy the items just for the brand or label but sometimes they could still be deceived with imitations.

Dr Mahathir said that former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim had instead been successful in displaying himself as someone who was pious, who could act as an imam and could deliver sermons.

He also extended financial assistance to Islamic bodies abroad and could speak of the religion and convince people to the extent that people believed that he was someone pious and good who observed the teachings of Islam.

"When the people already have such a picture of him, it is rather difficult for us to show that actually he is not what he makes himself out to be...he is actually not a pious person, in fact far from it," he said.

However, he said, when people had already accepted such a label of him, it was rather difficult for Umno to convince people that they had a wrong notion as it was actually the reverse.

"This is the problem we are facing now...how to convince people who are obsessed, those who truly believe in the goodness of this person, that actually he is not such.

"...This person is clever in planning his strategy to truly show that he is someone who strongly upholds the teachings of the religion, pious and could never do anything against the teachings of Islam," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that today, Umno would try to reveal that Anwar was not what people thought him to be but many people could not believe it.

Anwar, he said, deliberately displayed himself that way for the purpose of gaining support from people who believed him.

He said that Anwar displayed such a character for years that people associated him with goodness and when there were accusations that he was not that good, it was difficult for people to accept that.

"That is why, in our efforts to counter such lies, we face such great lies and it is difficult for us to succeed unless we could show repeated proof that the truth are lies and that the lies are tthe truth," he said.

-- BERNAMA

AFY/ARA RM