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Mahathir - Cumaraswamy

M'YSIA ACCEPTS WORLD COURT RULING, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

ALOR SETAR, April 30 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Malaysia accepted yesterday's ruling by the World Court that Datuk Param Cumaraswamy, the United Nations special rapporteur on human rights, was entitled to immunity from legal proceedings.

"We now know that when we give immunity to a person to work for the UN, he is free to do what he likes," Dr Mahathir said at a press conference on arrival at the Sultan Abdul Halim Airport in Kepala Batas here to begin a three-day visit to Kedah.

Dr Mahathir said: "The next time we get a request for a Malaysian to serve with the UN, we like to know exactly the extent of his immunity because we know that Param is someone who is, from the very beginning, suspicious of the government."

He said when the government agreed to nominate Param for the job, it reckoned that Param would be responsible for his actions.

According to news reports, the ruling by the World Court, which is the UN's top court based in the Hague, is technically non-binding.

Param faces lawsuits from several Malaysian companies seeking a total of US\$112 million (RM426 million) in damages for allegedly defamatory comments he made in an interview with a British magazine, International Commercial Litigation.

Dr Mahathir said a person making observations or whatever appraisals must give a semblance of neutrality.

"If we pick a person whose inclinations are already known, obviously his reports reflect his bias," he said.

The prime minister said the government's earlier understanding of a UN rapporteur's immunity was that relating to his studies and reports to the UN only.

But now, he said, it appeared that the immunity also covered differences in views regarding issues reported in the newspapers.

"He is free to say anything, condemn the government. This is his immunity. This is determined by the World Court and we accept it. He is free to say what he likes whether it is the truth or not, it does not matter," said Dr Mahathir.

The prime minister said the government had only wanted a person to uphold the truth and not to make wild allegations.

Meanwhile in KUALA LUMPUR, Param, a lawyer by profession, said in a statement that he welcomed the court's advisory opinion on the privileges and immunities of the UN and its functionaries.

He said the ruling came at a crucial time when certain governments appeared to have become hostile towards the UN special procedure mechanism for the protection of human rights.

"This opinion, which is decisive between the UN and Malaysia, will strengthen the special procedure mechanism and give required protection to the large number of UN human rights monitors all over the world," he added.

-- BERNAMA

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