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Mahathir-Explain

MAHATHIR SAYS NATION-WIDE VISIT NECESSARY TO OVERCOME CONFUSION

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 16 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he has to travel throughout the country to clear the confusion faced by the people following intense propaganda spread by certain groups.

The prime minister said he would begin the series of visits to the states after his three-day trip to Sabah starting on Thursday.

"There are various ways (of spreading the propaganda), so much so that a Chinese New Year message from prison, which had never been done before, now exists, this never happened previously."

Dr Mahathir said certain groups were exploiting the freedom of expression to create various issues aimed at confusing the people.

"Otherwise they say we are not democratic, but they are taking full advantage to confuse the people...so I have to explain," he said after attending a Chinese New Year luncheon given by Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Law Hieng Ding, here today.

He said the visits would be similar to the series of visits he made previously including when the country was facing the economic crisis.

"I believe the people do not have full information. So I will use the opportunity during my meeting with the people to make clarification. I feel as a politician, it is my duty," he said.

Asked whether the same confusion was raised by Malaysian students whom he met in London during his recent visit there, Dr Mahathir said the students appeared to have been influenced by the development in Indonesia, as though all the problems would be resolved if he stepped down.

"This is not a matter of my stepping down, and everything will be settled. The problem is that we need to work together to stave off the efforts to destabilise our country," he explained.

The prime minister said although Umno had clarified on the matter, the explanation and clarification must not end there.

He said that explanation on the problem needed maximum cooperation from everyone.

Asked to comment on the view of Kelantan Menteri Besar Datuk Nik Aziz Nik Mat that he is an intelligent and wise prime minister but does not use his wisdom for Islam, Dr Mahathir said: "Nik Aziz does not understand the difference between secularism and religion."

The prime minister explained that secularism had a different meaning in Islam and in Europe.

He said the word came about in Europe because some time ago, the government in Europe was dominated by the church and the leaders then felt that the church should be separated from the state so that the government would no longer be influenced by the church.

"In Islam, everything that we do is within the context of religion. If we govern, it is a religious matter (because) we learn.

"Thus, they are influenced by western thinking. The word secular also originated from the west, that's why the word is not found at all in the Malay language because the secular western thinking can be divided into the human life in the hereafter and in the present world."

On the other hand, he said, in Islam, everything that we do is related to religion.

Meanwhile, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Haji Ahmad Badawi who was also present, said the Umno supreme council would decide on the membership of the panel of lawyers to study and take action on those who

made wild and false allegations against the party and leaders.

"We will decide at the supreme council (meeting)," said Abdullah, who is also Umno vice president.

Asked whether Umno had identified the lawyers who would sit on the panel, Abdullah said they had yet to identify them.

"Even now there are offers (from lawyers) to provide their service, so the matter will be presented to Datuk Seri President (Dr Mahathir) at the coming council meeting," he said.

The formation of the panel was announced by Abdullah on Feb 6 to take action against those who criticise and slander the party, leaders and government.

The luncheon was also attended by the prime minister's wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, Abdullah's wife, Datin Seri Endon Mahmood, several cabinet ministers and corporate leaders.

-- BERNAMA

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