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PM dismisses suggestion his China trip is a political gimmick

A. Kadir Jasin in Beijing

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday scoffed at a suggestion that his visit to China was a political gimmick, saying that the Opposition parties were free to make whatever allegations they like.

Responding to questions at a Press conference held at the end of his three-day working visit here, Dr Mahathir said his China trip was planned a long time ago to coincide with the 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

On Thursday he attended the friendship night at China World Hotel to commemorate the occasion. Representing China was its Vice-Premier Qian Qichen.

Dr Mahathir left for Russia's Buryatia Republic yesterday morning.

He dismissed the suggestion that the trip was intended to attract Chinese votes in the general election, saying that the Chinese community was more interested in the economic wellbeing of the country (than his visit to China).

"This visit was planned a long time ago to coincide with the 25th anniversary of Malaysia-China diplomatic relations," the Prime Minister said.

Responding to a suggestion that the late Tun Abdul Razak called the election immediately upon his return from China in 1974 and went on to score a huge success, Dr Mahathir said jokingly that he would have to think about it.

He said if by any chance the election was called soon, his visit to China was purely coincidental.

Although he did not think the election might be called soon, he agreed that anything was possible.

Dr Mahathir said the Opposition parties made all kinds of promises all the time because they knew they did not have to fulfil them as their chances of winning were slim.

Pas recently promised a five-day working week and three-month maternity leave if it won the election.

"They even promise that their supporters will go to heaven," said Dr Mahathir in a light-hearted manner.

On human rights, the Prime Minister said abuses took place everywhere.

But the sins of the West were not often highlighted because Asians by nature were less likely to criticise other people. He said the poor treatment of the natives and aboriginal people by Western nations was well documented.

Aboriginal people died in detention while others were totally wiped out.

"In Malaysia, by contrast, the population of native people and aborigines is increasing," said the Prime Minister.

He asked the West to look at its own record before preaching human rights to others.

Asked if he had any regrets over the decision to sack and charge his former deputy, Dr Mahathir said he had none.

"The law must take its course. One always forget that he was a friend of mine and not my enemy.

"Several Ministers and Chief Ministers had been charged with corruption and other crimes and found guilty.

"Two state executive councillors from my own party are currently on trial for corruption," he said.

On the cancellation of the planned ground breaking ceremony for a Proton car plant in Inner Mongolia, Dr Mahathir said it could not be helped because negotiations with the central government had yet to be completed.

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