

30/05/1999

PM: Hate campaign using varsity students

Syed Nadzri in Nagoya

A CAMPAIGN to bring down the Barisan Nasional government is being carried out throughout Malaysia by using some university students instilled with a deep sense of ingratitude, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

The hate campaign is designed to get the younger generation of Malaysians to work hard to change the government.

He said the students, among other things, would return to their kampungs during their vacation to instil hatred, especially against him.

The Prime Minister was speaking at a dialogue in Nagoya yesterday with about 70 Malaysian students doing courses in various Japanese universities and colleges.

The 90-minute meeting at Nagoya Kanko Hotel took place five hours after his arrival for a week-long visit to Japan, accompanied by his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali.

Dr Mahathir said as part of the campaign, the students would be told that it was the duty of any government to provide scholarships or assistance and as such, they need not be grateful to Barisan Nasional for providing the benefits.

Dismissing this notion, he said the Government was extending such assistance not to benefit himself as Prime Minister but for future generations of Malaysians.

"I hope the students will not be easily influenced by such campaigns and it is best that the students themselves bring it up with the Government if they still have doubts," he added.

At the dialogue, he also touched on current issues, explaining Malaysia's economic situation and political climate including the case of former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim who was sentenced to six years' jail recently for abuse of power.

Dr Mahathir said he had received "appeals" from some of Anwar's friends including renowned composer and conductor, the late Yehudi Menuhin, asking for Anwar to be released.

The Prime Minister said he told them that he had no power to release a person who had faced court action.

He said some people even chose to think that he was cruel because of the action against Anwar but that, he added, would not deter him from carrying out his duties responsibly.

The Anwar case, he noted, also provided a great opportunity for the opposition to seek a common ground against the Barisan Nasional despite their varied principles.

He said Pas, for instance, is fighting for an Islamic State, the DAP for a "Malaysian Malaysia" and PRM seeking to come back from the dead.

As for Parti Keadilan Rakyat, it would go along with any of these as long as Anwar is freed.

On the economy, Dr Mahathir said it was poised to register a one per cent growth this year and five per cent the next.

The target could be achieved, he said, although lack of spending by some government agencies had slowed down the recovery during the first half of this year.

During the dialogue, a student pointed out that Malaysia and Dr Mahathir had always had a positive image among the Japanese, to which the Prime Minister replied that this was true compared to what some Westerners

thought of the country.

Dr Mahathir cited the current Hollywood movie Entrapment which was shot in Malaysia as an example.

He said the movie had superimposed scenes to show the Petronas Twin Towers in Kuala Lumpur surrounded by slums.

"It is like depicting the New York World Trade Centre next to Harlem ... which is not true," he said. "We don't deny that there are squatters in Kuala Lumpur but they are not near the Petronas towers."

"But it doesn't matter. We will take great pains to build our country and one day, they (the West) will have to accept it," he said.

The Prime Minister will have private programmes in Nagoya today and tomorrow.

On Tuesday, he is scheduled to visit the Toyota plant and museum on the outskirts.

Dr Mahathir goes to Tokyo on Wednesday where he will meet Japanese vice-minister for International Affairs at the Finance Ministry Dr Eisuke Sakakibara.

On Thursday, Dr Mahathir will attend the launch of his book A New Deal for Asia and will speak at the Nikkei International Conference on "The Future of Asia."

He will wind up his visit by meeting Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi, also on Thursday.

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