

18 JUN 1999

Singapore-Mahathir

SINGAPORE PAPER SLAMMED FOR MEDDLING IN M'SIAN AFFAIRS

By: E. Sivabalan

KUALA LUMPUR, June 18 (Bernama) -- Just as Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was warning Malaysians of attempts by foreigners to meddle in Malaysian affairs, a Singapore daily has seen fit to suggest that Malaysia will be better off led by a new team in the new millennium.

The Singapore "Business Times" in its editorial today said for Dr Mahathir, winning the next election alone would not seal his legacy.

"That will only come if he can set the foundations for Malaysia's sustained economic progress in the new millenium under a new team.

"That will be served best if he allows fresh faces to emerge and new ideas to blossom," the newspaper said.

The editorial comes a day after Dr Mahathir, who is Umno president, quashed talk of him announcing his resignation at the 53rd Umno Assembly which opened today.

The paper said as Malaysia's longest serving prime minister, Dr Mahathir had an assured place in history.

"But how he will be remembered will depend also on how he hands over power. In particular, will he end up hogging the stage for longer than he should?"

The paper also said "things cannot bode well for its (Malaysia's) future" when the names of Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah dan Tan Sri Musa Hitam were being mentioned for a possible return in the Umno leadership.

It said the Barisan Nasional coalition had been characterised by component parties which show a very low propensity for renewal.

It pointed out that Dr Ling Liong Sik had been at the helm of the MCA since 1986, Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu of MIC since 1980 and that even Gerakan had not seen a leadership change for more than a decade.

The Business Times is the sole business daily in Singapore, which itself had seen only one change of prime minister since its independence in 1965. Lee Kuan Yew stepped down in 1990 after 31 years in office but continues to serve as Senior Minister.

Commenting on the editorial, Tengku Razaleigh said it was improper for the paper to comment on the leadership of this country.

"They are agents trying to incite trouble," he said.

"People who have this kind of view have motives to disrupt good relations between countries and peoples."

Tengku Razaleigh said judging from Dr Mahathir's speech at the opening of the Umno general assembly here today, it clearly demonstrated his leadership.

"The people still want him to continue," he said.

"The leadership of the country will be determined by the people of this country and the leadership of the party will be determined by the members of the party and not foreign papers and journalists like this," Tengku Razaleigh said.

Works Minister and MIC leader Datuk Samy Vellu also criticised the paper for meddling in the internal affairs of the country.

"They have no right to speak about the leadership of this country. Only the people of Malaysia can decide what is good for the country," he said.

Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Ibrahim Ali described the editorial as "very unbecoming and undemocratic".

"I think they know that we practise democracy. Democracy means anybody who has the support of the people should continue to serve them and the

country," said Ibrahim, who is also an Umno Supreme Council member.

He said Umno members were solid in their support for Dr Mahathir.

People's Progressive Party (PPP) president Datuk M.Kayveas chided the paper for being insensitive to the feelings of Malaysians.

He said the paper's comment was uncalled for.

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