

27 NOV 1999

Mahathir-Anwar

SYMPATHY SHOULD NOT BE A FACTOR, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

BUKIT MERTAJAM, Nov 27 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today sympathy should not be a factor in determining the outcome of the general election which needs every voter to make a wise decision.

Referring to the sacking of his deputy, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, he said he was aware that many people were sad over Anwar's fate and this included himself, especially when he knew Anwar's wife and children.

"However, today we are having an election, not to let off steam or anger...and factors like sadness and sympathy should not be used as a basis for decision," he said.

"Although he is my friend, I have to choose between friend and country," Dr Mahathir said when opening the Seberang Prai Polytechnic, near here, which is in the Permatang Pauh parliamentary constituency.

The constituency will see a straight fight between the Barisan Nasional's (BN) Datuk Dr Ibrahim Saad and Keadilan president Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, who is Anwar's wife, in the general election on Monday.

Dr Mahathir said Wan Azizah had used the sympathy factor to garner votes in the constituency.

Speaking at length on his reasons for sacking Anwar as deputy prime minister and finance minister, Dr Mahathir said what befell Anwar was his own doing and he had not been victimised.

"We did not victimise the former deputy prime minister. No one victimised him, he brought it onto himself with his behaviour," he said.

"I myself did not expect it because for 16 years I regarded him as pious, true to Islam. Finally I obtained clear proof that he is not what he is portrayed to be," he said.

The prime minister said that because of this, he found his former deputy to be not qualified to succeed him as the country's leader.

"Unfortunately for him and for me, I find him not qualified," he added.

Dr Mahathir said he could not explain further on Anwar's acts because Anwar's case was pending.

He proposed to give further explanations after the trial.

Anwar was jailed for six years for corrupt practice and is now being tried for sodomy.

Dr Mahathir said he had intended to step down after the Commonwealth Games last year but had to defer the decision because he was worried that his successor would not be able to handle the economic downturn affecting the country then.

He said he had clear proof against Anwar in September last year and so did not hesitate to drop him from the government.

"Although he is my friend, he had to be dropped because I have to put the country's interest above all else.

"That is the only power I have as a prime minister. I cannot do anything else," he said.

Umno then took disciplinary action according to the party's regulations to sack Anwar from his party post and as an Umno member, he said.

Dr Mahathir admitted that in the beginning he loved Anwar and trusted him to the extent of giving him a chance to hold an important post in the government until he became deputy prime minister and finance minister.

In fact he did not stop Anwar from contesting for key posts in Umno

including that of deputy president although he did not agree with Anwar's intention.

"Because I love this person...although he is ambitious, I felt that he had talent to be PM. I told my colleagues in the cabinet that this is the person to replace me," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that only after obtaining proof did he realise that his former deputy was not what he thought him to be.

Dr Mahathir said he realised Anwar's weakness when he saw him handling the financial crisis according to the bidding of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Anwar's decisions caused the nation's economy to take a turn for the worse when interest rates were raised and loans reduced, putting more banks and businesses in serious condition and at risk of winding up, he said.

"As a cabinet member, I allowed him to use his discretion, but when he imposed these conditions our economy became worse.

"Clearly he did not know and was not skilled enough in managing the country's economy. Because of that, the MTEN (National Economic Action Council) took over the job and we crafted our own method to manage the economy," he said.

The prime minister said although Malaysia had received many criticisms, it was now regarded as a country that had succeeded in overcoming the economic downturn on its own without outside help.

"We don't care about anyone's criticism. Today our economy has recovered and the businessmen and workers are no longer under pressure. If we had followed the IMF's advice we would still be poor," he said.

-- BERNAMA

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