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`Umno going all-out to counter lies'

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Umno will launch an immediate large-scale campaign to counter lies and slander by the opposition which have left the people confused.

Party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that the campaign, involving all party leaders and levels, would include information sessions and distribution of leaflets explaining a wide range of issues.

"We need to expose all the lies. The campaign will go on until the general election," he said after chairing a party supreme council meeting.

It is understood that the campaign will be spearheaded by a new information chief who will take over the post from Datuk Dr Yusof Nor.

The person rumoured to be given the task is Yan MP Datuk Badrudin Amiruldin, the Kedah Umno information chief.

He said the campaign would be separate from his second round of State visits.

He will be in Kedah for two days beginning Oct 21 with programmes outlined, including a signing ceremony with Thailand on gas production.

Dr Mahathir said a large-scale campaign was vital as it had been found that the lies and accusations by the Opposition on issues like Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim being poisoned by the Government had led to street demonstrations.

"They know that this approach is effective in agitating the people to riot, which affects the country's image. The economy will also be hurt when tourists or businessmen are afraid to visit or invest here."

On whether the nationwide campaign indicated that the Umno anti-defamation committee had been ineffective, he said the lies and slander were widespread and getting worse, which made the campaign necessary.

On whether the court ruling preventing anyone from commenting on the Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim case would pose problems to the BN campaign, he said the information sessions would not touch on the on-going trial.

"We will only touch on statements made outside court, like the accusation by Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail that her husband was poisoned by the Government."

Asked whether it could be too late to launch the campaign considering that Anwar was removed from the Cabinet more than a year ago, Dr Mahathir said it was never too late to do so.

"Lies have to be countered, if not, the people will believe in them. Some people are so gullible (in believing lies), like rumours saying that I am gravely ill, which later turned out to be false."

On whether Anwar could be expected to create another issue in his bid to gain support, Dr Mahathir said: "I do not know about that but I believe the trial will be prolonged, a lot of things will occur that will prevent it from ending."

"When it is still on-going, we cannot say anything at all ... we cannot deny or comment (on court proceedings), we must keep quiet but they will get political mileage from things said in court."

Because the country practised such a law, he said some lawyers who were also politicians could "hide" behind the court to make political statements which could not be countered by anyone.

Dr Mahathir also announced that the Barisan Nasional would celebrate its 25th anniversary on Oct 24 at Stadium Nasional in Bukit Jalil, with the

event to be telecast live. Similar celebrations will be held simultaneously at state-level.

To a question on whether the announcement on the general election would be made after the celebrations as in 1995 when the dissolution of Parliament was announced after a meeting of the BN supreme council, Dr Mahathir said the anniversary was already scheduled for this year.

On whether BN had finalised its candidates, Dr Mahathir replied in the negative, saying there was still time to do so.

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