

19 JUN 1999

Umno-Singapore

UMNO YOUTH WANTS SINGAPORE PAPER TO APOLOGISE, RETRACT EDITORIAL

KUALA LUMPUR, June 19 (Bernama) -- Malaysian leaders today continued to lambast a Singapore daily for carrying an editorial seen as meddling in the country's affairs, while Umno Youth called on the paper to apologise and retract the report.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said Malaysia did not need advice, views or comments from Singapore on matters about the country's leadership.

"We are the ones who decide; Umno can decide the leaders they want," he said in an interview with Bernama TV during a surprise visit to the media centre at the Putra World Trade Centre here where the Umno general assembly is being held.

The Singapore Business Times' editorial yesterday said that winning the general election will not seal Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's legacy "because that will only come if he can set the foundations for Malaysia's sustained economic progress in the new millennium under a new team."

Following that, Malaysia's financial daily Business Times, in its editorial today with the heading "Don't take neighbours for granted", asked whether the Singapore daily was "exercising a new-found press freedom where they are free to criticise as long as it's not their own government."

Abdullah, an Umno vice-president, said what was clear was that Umno still needed the leadership of Dr Mahathir as he was still healthy and capable.

"This is our view. We need not pay any attention at all to what Singapore said.

"Actually they should know that such talk is in fact an attempt to meddle in the affairs of our country," said Abdullah who is performing the duties of Umno deputy president.

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said the Singapore daily's action was disrespectful and could jeopardise the Asean spirit.

"They have interfered in our internal affairs. Our newspapers have never made comments asking that their leadership be changed," he said.

He urged Singapore newspapers to adhere to the Asean spirit and refrain from meddling in the internal political affairs of other countries.

Syed Hamid wanted Malaysians to inculcate the spirit of patriotism that only the people should decide their own government, and outsiders had no business in such matters.

Acting Umno Youth head Datuk Hishammuddin Tun Hussein said the editorial showed the arrogance, and total disregard and disrespect of the Singapore daily towards Malaysia's leaders.

"This is totally unbecoming. We know so well that they can't criticise their own leaders; they don't have the ability to voice anything when it comes to their own government and their own leaders," he said in an interview here.

"I would advise them before this thing gets out of hand to retract the editorial and apologise because I look at it very seriously, and it is something we should not take very lightly," he said.

Asked if the editorial would harm bilateral ties, Hishammuddin said Malaysia-Singapore ties had always had its ups and downs.

"But, it is based on mutual respect and an article such as this clearly

shows they are irresponsible and disregard whatever relationship there is between Malaysia and Singapore.

"So, they should do the right thing and apologise as well as retract the editorial," said Hishammuddin, who is Deputy Primary Industries Minister.

Yesterday, several leaders including former Parti Melayu Semangat 46 president Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah slammed the Singapore daily for its inappropriate comment on the Malaysian leadership.

-- BERNAMA

ES NZ NAK YBY