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Mahathir-Umno (Congres)

US CONGRESS HITTING BELOW THE BELT, SAY MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, June 18 (Bernama) -- The United States Congress has hit Malaysia "below the belt" in passing judgement on the country by questioning her judicial system, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

Addressing the 53rd Umno general assembly here, he said Malaysia was not even given the opportunity to defend herself against overseas campaign to smear the country.

Dr Mahathir, who is Umno president, read out to the assembly a Bernama report from Washington on a Congressional Sub-Committee hearing on Malaysia on Wednesday.

Not only was Malaysia unrepresented to defend herself, the sub-committee even changed the theme of the hearing to a more negative tone, he said.

"The original theme of 'Malaysia Under the Leadership of Mahathir Mohamad' was changed to a more negative tone of 'Assessing the Mahathir Agenda'," he said.

Dr Mahathir said: "In Malaysia, we accord the accused the opportunity to defend himself. Even in the (Umno) Supreme Council we give the members chance to defend themselves," he said.

"And in the court, the accused is allowed to engage several lawyers to defend himself. In the (corruption) trial of former deputy prime minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, nine lawyers defended him but what is it that was done in the US recently?" Dr Mahathir asked.

The prime minister said Malaysia's representative was not at the congressional sub-committee hearing to defend Malaysia's position whereas the witnesses called were those who disliked Malaysia.

"This is how they judge us. I can't even be present. Can't even defend myself and yet they put me on trial," he said.

Sub-committee chairman Doug Bereuter had said that the hearing was meant to educate the American public.

The three witnesses called to testify at the hearing were Ralph Boyce, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs, Douglas Paal, president of the Asia Pacific Policy Center and Dr Linda Lim, a Singaporean teaching at the University of Michigan Business School.

The Bernama report said that the one-and-the half hour hearing was poorly-attended and only three out of 21 members of the sub-committee were present.

Paal had admitted at the hearing that his centre had collaborated with Anwar and had benefited from donations from Anwar and his associates.

Dr Mahathir said: "This clearly shows that there was collaboration between insiders and outsiders."

The prime minister said Paal now no longer received financial assistance from Anwar now that the former finance minister is in jail.

Anwar is serving a six-year jail term for corrupt practice of abusing his powers as deputy prime minister.

-- BERNAMA

SHO NAK RYN