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`Sandiwara, conspiracy latest buzz words for Opposition'

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SEPANG, Fri. - The Prime Minister today expressed remorse over the Opposition's continuous spreading of lies that certain events in the country were Government-staged sandiwara (drama).

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said sandiwara and conspiracy seemed to be the latest buzz words among the Opposition.

"Yes, everything we do is sandiwara and conspiracy. The Government does nothing but indulge in staging sandiwara, from the way we manage the economy, the attacks on the ringgit, to the methods adopted in addressing the financial crisis."

He said this when asked to comment on claims by Pas that besides the Grik arms heist, the recent debate over the special rights of the Malays was also staged by the Government aimed at securing support from the community.

Dr Mahathir was speaking at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport on arrival from attending the South African International Dialogue in Mozambique and an economic meeting in London.

On another claim that only Umno had benefited from the special rights given to the Malays, Dr Mahathir said:

"If that is so, then ask them to pay back the scholarships, all village roads should be dug up. Also, what about the revenues collected from the cities and channelled for rural development?"

"If they are saying so, then they are not enjoying these benefits ... these people are an ungrateful lot."

On why some people were still not convinced despite explanations by the Government, Dr Mahathir said it was difficult to persuade those who had already made up their mind.

"For them, if we say this is white, they will say it is black. When we say black, they say white. With this kind of people, we can't say much."

The Prime Minister also chided a website supporting the Opposition for concocting stories that Umno and government officials had been directed not to wear skull cap and sport goatee at functions attended by him.

"It is not laman reformasi but laman fitnah. It is all lies, aimed at instilling hatred against the Government. It is not surprising that they are resorting to this."

On action to be taken to counter the lies, he said: "There is no action. We will continue with our normal ways of dressing. They can wear a skull cap or sport goatee if they want, just don't label those clean-shaven as unIslamic."

To another question, Dr Mahathir said the Government would make every effort to secure the release of the remaining foreign hostages kidnapped from Pulau Sipadan four months ago.

"Yes, we should try," he said when asked whether Malaysian officials who had played a role in securing the release of nine Malaysians should continue with their efforts.

Of the 21 people kidnapped by rebels at the resort island off Sabah on April 23 and brought to Jolo Island in the Philippines, nine Malaysians, one German and one Filipino have so far been released by their captors.

The others still being held are two Germans, one Lebanese, two French, two Finns, two South Africans and one Filipino.

When asked about the rotation of the Sabah Chief Minister's post, Dr Mahathir said: "I will find out and look into it."

When pointed out that the people in Sabah seemed divided over the issue, the Prime Minister said he would discuss the matter with them (Sabah Barisan Nasional).

"I should not make any public statement because my stand might be twisted ... after that I cannot negotiate and discuss."

On the review for the Port Dickson-Seremban and Kulim-Butterworth expressways toll rates, Dr Mahathir said a decision on it had been postponed.

To a query on whether motorists should be asked to pay the old rates while waiting for the review to be completed, he said those involved should be given the chance to discuss the matter.

He added that he would also study the merit of having a Women Affairs Ministry as proposed by a special conference on women recently.

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