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Dr M: I don't feel snubbed by withdrawal of invitation

Ahirudin Attan; Saiful Azhar Abdullah in London

DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he did not feel "snubbed" by the decision of the Islamic Society of North America to withdraw its invitation for him to address its convention in Rosemont, Illinois next week.

Saying "it is their right to withdraw the invitation", the Prime Minister told Malaysian journalists yesterday that "it is fine by me".

Dr Mahathir said he did not feel "any snub" because "maybe I have a thick skin".

"But I feel sorry for them ... they only listen to one side."

According to a foreign news report, Isna withdrew its invitation because "dozens and dozens" of its members were unhappy with Dr Mahathir's treatment of jailed ex-Deputy Prime Minister (Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim).

Isna secretary-general Sayyid M. Syeed was reported to have said on Monday that protests might be staged if the Prime Minister appeared at the gathering to be held from Sept 1-4.

Asked about this, Dr Mahathir said: "It is also their right in their country to demonstrate ... I can't stop them."

On the possibility of the involvement of governments in influencing the society's decision, he said: "I don't see any."

The society had become a supporter of Anwar, said Dr Mahathir, and that was why it decided to withdraw the invitation.

"It is its right to invite and it has been inviting me for many years ... now it wants to withdraw, it is its right.

"But it clearly shows that it (Isna) just listens to one side of the story and refuses to get the truth from the other side.

"It is the same 'disease' that we are facing (back home), some people are only interested in listening to one side and refuse to listen to the versions of others," he said.

Asked whether he thought the decision to withdraw the invitation was a "form of politicking by the society" and an attempt to embarrass him, Dr Mahathir said:

"I don't know and I don't care whether there's politicking or not ... they withdraw the invitation, that's fine by me.

"I don't have to go for that but I'll go for other things ... I have other engagements and the trip (to the US) is on."

Dr Mahathir will leave for the United States at the end of this month to receive an achievement award from American-based Islamic financial organisation Lariba.

The awards is in recognition of Dr Mahathir being a "leading role model in charting new courses in economic development, monetary policy, and multi-cultural and multi-ethnic co-existence and also putting in practice the pioneering spirit of doing the unusual during the 1998 Asian economic and monetary meltdown".

The Prime Minister is also scheduled to attend a US-Asean business council meeting and to visit the research and development facility of a major American investor in Malaysia.

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