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Mahathir-Judiciary

GIVE THE JUDICIARY A CHANCE, DR MAHATHIR TELLS CRITICS

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 28 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has asked critics of the country's judiciary to give the newly-appointed chief justice and attorney-general a chance to make whatever changes to further improve the administration of the judiciary.

"Yes, I think so, because people must give some lee-way," the prime minister said when asked if the appointments of Tan Sri Mohamed Dzaiddin Abdullah as Chief Justice of the Federal Court and Datuk Ainum Mohd Saaid as the AG recently could restore public confidence in the judiciary.

Dzaiddin was quoted as saying on Dec 20 that restoring public confidence in the judiciary was his first priority and his immediate task was to "put our house in order" through interaction, discussions and consultations and mutual respect among the judges.

Criticisms against the judiciary, including from international organisations, had centred on the question of its independence.

In an exclusive interview with Bernama at his office in Putrajaya last Tuesday, Dr Mahathir said the critics had attacked the judiciary without realising that the judges were human beings too and had weaknesses.

"There may be charges (against the judiciary) but they (judges) are not angels. They are not people who are perfect. So, they have their problems," he said.

The prime minister said the people must be flexible in their thinking on the performance of those in the judiciary.

During the hour-long interview, Dr Mahathir was also asked how the government was going to resolve the rice glut problem in Penang, Kedah and Perlis.

He said the government would have to stop imports of rice similar in quality to local rice and step up enforcement to curb smuggling.

He, however, said that Malaysia could not totally stop the import of rice because it had agreements with other countries.

"Therefore, we should continue the import. At the same time of course, we must strengthen the border checkpoints, etc where there is a leakage," he said.

Admitting that there was rice and petroleum smuggling going on in the country, Dr Mahathir said enforcement at the border was not effective and had to be strengthened.

"We will have to attend to it. We may have to be very harsh. When we put people in the place for far too long, they begin to develop familiarity with the situation and the rice would be smuggled," he said.

On government subsidy for the rice industry, Dr Mahathir said the cost of production was high compared with Malaysia's neighbours.

"So, our rice would have to be sold at a high price but if we sell at a high price, nobody will buy our rice. So, the government undertakes to subsidise the price of rice, not in a big way but in a small way, because we don't like to distort the market either.

"It is a tricky thing to do, but it has worked over the years, and worked quite well," he said, adding that Malaysia was surrounded by countries with low-cost labour and low-cost of production of rice.

-- BERNAMA

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