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Mahathir-Violence

GOVERNMENT TO CURB INCLINATION TOWARDS VIOLENCE IN POLITICS, SAYS PM

PUTRAJAYA, Dec 23 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that the government will take measures to curb the tendency in politics to display elements of violence, incite racial sentiments and exploit religion including labelling others as infidels, next year.

He said that such tendencies were most unhealthy for the future of the nation and the situation would become worse if left unchecked.

"As such, next year we hope that this can be overcome...we are studying the measures," he said in an interview after recording his New Year message to be broadcast over Radio Televisyen Malaysia (RTM), at his office, here.

Dr Mahathir said that the tendency to resort to violence by some people was obvious in the recent by-election in Lunas, Kedah, where the opposition put the voters in fear.

"It was obvious that they frightened the voters...this does not augur well for the nation if left unchecked as it may become rampant," he said.

The prime minister said that elements of violence could also be seen in the boldness of the opposition to challenge the police and contravene the law, which was very dangerous as the situation would be chaotic if the law of the country was no longer respected.

Dr Mahathir said apart from that, there were groups causing tension in relations between the various races like the Al Ma'unah which had allegedly killed two non-Muslims who were captured by the group members in Sauk, Perak.

"Developments in 2000 are disheartening. Even though we are satisfied with the economy, in terms of politics we have seen the existence of violence," he said.

He said that the religious issues exploited by the opposition not only affected the religion of Islam but also Christianity, meant to place Christians and Muslims at loggerheads.

An example, he said, was the distribution of posters of the Barisan Nasional (BN) candidate in Lunas superimposed to make him appear as if he was wearing a robe of a priest, merely to cause anger among the Muslims.

"This is the worst manner because it incites the Muslims to be in enmity with the Christians (whereas) in Malaysia the Muslims and Christians have no problem...we never clashed because of religion," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that the inclination of the opposition parties to exploit Islam by labelling others as infidels was also worrying as this had also penetrated the university campuses.

He said this was revealed by reports of students contesting for posts in the students union following suit by labelling those not in support of them as infidels and unfortunately a few lecturers were also involved in such incidents.

The government which sets up universities for students to study, he said, felt that their studies should not be disrupted by partisan politics.

"Unfortunately, I'm saying it outright, that opposition parties have penetrated the campuses and incite students into opposing the government," he said.

On demands which challenge certain rights already enshrined in the constitution, he said that this was resorted to by a small group which does not understand the social contract and act in a way as if Malaysia was a country of only one race.

Touching on economic challenges, Dr Mahathir said that the year 2000 was a most challenging year because Malaysia's economy, even though recording a growth, faced problems in the stock market following the actions of foreign concerns to withdraw investments and taking them away to other more lucrative places.

"There have also been rumours...despite that we are still fortunate because our ports recorded increases in the total volume of cargo handled and in other aspects, the economic performance was rather good," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that rubber and palm oil prices also continued to decline drastically because of oversupply in the world market, causing prices of the commodities to fall.

He said that the latest challenge was the fall in the prices of rice because of smuggling and had caused hardship to the rural folk.

"Sometimes we find it rather strange because even padi producers consume smuggled rice...as such smuggled rice have a good market," he said, adding that the petrol and diesel subsidy by the government was also enjoyed by foreigners when petrol and diesel were also smuggled out of the country.

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