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Mahathir-Chinese

GOVT ALSO HELPED CHINESE DURING RECESSION, SAYS MAHATHIR

JITRA, Nov 26 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that the government had helped the Chinese business community a lot by implementing economic recovery programmes so that they would not go bankrupt.

The Prime Minister believed that many Chinese businessmen would have gone bankrupt if the government had not helped them by taking certain measures during the recession which hit the country before the 1999 general election.

However, he was disappointed with the way certain groups like the Chinese education movement had acted despite the government's gesture to help the Chinese.

"Before the (last) general election, we helped the Chinese a lot. If not they would have become bankrupt. But this is what we get in return," he told reporters after visiting flood-hit areas and evacuation centres in the Kubang Pasu parliamentary constituency which he represents.

Dr Mahathir said this when asked to comment on reports that the Chinese education movement was supporting the opposition in the Lunas state by-election, polling for which is on Wednesday.

Dr Mahathir said if it was true that the movement was backing the opposition, then it should seek help from the opposition and not turn to the government anymore.

He said the government could overcome various problems involving the Chinese, including the Vision School issue.

He regretted that the movement did not want to mix with others and wished to isolate itself.

Asked on opposition allegations that development could only be obtained after an assemblyman's death, Dr Mahathir said: "Development has nothing to do with an elected representative's death because it is carried out continuously."

The allegation was made by the opposition during campaigning in the Lunas by-election.

The prime minister said the allegation was a dirty view of the opposition.

"In my area (Kubang Pasu), there is development. I am still alive. In other constituencies, it is the same situation," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the opposition was playing on racial issues by appearing to be champions of the Chinese when speaking before a Chinese audience and shouting Malay slogans in predominantly Malay areas.

The opposition picked its candidate based on race and did not want to field an Indian candidate, he said.

He said this differed from the Barisan Nasional (BN) approach where a person would not be ruled out as a candidate just because of his racial origin.

The opposition was showing its racial tendency by refusing to allow an Indian to represent it in the by-election, he said.

BN's S. Anthonysamy, 59, a lawyer, faces Keadilan supreme council member Saifuddin Nasution Ismail and independent candidate N. Letchumanan in the by-election which was forced by the murder of BN assemblyman Dr Joe Fernandez on Nov 4.

-- BERNAMA

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