

02 MAR 2000

Mahathir-Harakah

HARAKAH HAD BEEN WARNED NOT TO BREAK THE LAW- DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, March 2 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today Harakah, the official organ of the opposition Parti Islam Se Malaysia (PAS), should have expected some form of punishment for repeatedly breaking the law.

He said the publisher had been called up and told not to break the law such as by circulating the paper to non-members but they continued selling it to the public especially during the elections.

"When you break the law you expect to be punished. Other people who do not break the law are not punished. The law must be obeyed whether you are of the opposition or government," he told reporters when asked if the new twice monthly permit for Harakah was a punishment.

The Prime Minister said this after opening the Kankeiren Asean Management Seminar, organised by the Kansai Economic Federation (Kankeiren) of Japan at the Renaissance Hotel here.

Dr Mahathir said in Malaysia the government was impartial as even government members who broke the law were taken to court, charged and sentenced.

"Opposition members cannot break the law and expect to be given privileges and not have any action taken against them," he said.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi who is Home Minister said yesterday, Harakah, which is published biweekly on Mondays and Fridays, was now allowed to be published only twice a month.

Abdullah said the reason was to standardise the publication of all political party newspapers or magazines in the country.

Dr Mahathir said action was not taken against Harakah during the election campaign as people would think that the government was trying to suppress the opposition's views.

The Prime Minister said the action taken against Harakah was in line with normal procedures and the government did not differentiate between government and opposition owned publications.

To a question why the government did not ban Harakah, Dr Mahathir said the government was gentle and preferred to give warnings and only then took stern action.

"First we give warning, and then we give a second warning, then we give a third warning. And then we take gentle action against them and if they continue to break the law we will be more serious with them. We are not very cruel like some countries in the West," he said.

On a suggestion that the buyer should be penalised instead of the publisher, Dr Mahathir said it was very difficult to do that as the authorities had to station their people at all the book stores.

"They (buyers) are not doing anything wrong, they are just buying something that are on sale. The people who are selling.... who know the terms of the publication..... as it appears in the condition..... that circulation is among members only and they are the ones who (should be punished)," he said.

Referring to the Umno Divisional conferences between now and April 30, Dr Mahathir who is also Umno President advised party members not to be involved in personal attacks.

Asked to comment on foreign programmes shown by Astro, Dr Mahathir said the government would have to study and see whether these foreign programmes were influencing the people or otherwise.

On claims that too many foreign programmes would have a bad effect on the people, the Prime Minister said the matter would be studied.

Of the 28 Astro channels, one channel, Vannaavil was devoted to Tamil programmes and four to Chinese programmes AEC, TVBS Asia, Phoenix and Astro Wah Lai Toi. The five channels show 100 per cent foreign programmes from Taiwan, Hong Kong and India.

-- BERNAMA

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