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It's ISNA's right to withdraw invite: PM

Ahirudin Attan; Saiful Azhar Abdullah in London

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

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

"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 on Monday to have said that protests might be staged if the Prime Minister appeared at the gathering to be held on September 1-4.

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

"It is their right to invite and they have been inviting me for many years... now they want to withdraw, it is their right.

"They have become a supporter of Anwar and that's why they withdraw the invitation... that is not a prob with us," said Dr Mahathir.

"It clearly shows that they (ISNA) just listen to one side of the story and they refuse to get the truth for 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 others," he said.

Asked whether he thought that 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," he added.

Dr Mahathir will leave for the US end of this month to receive an achievement award from American-based Islamic financial organisation Lariba in recognition of his "leading role model in charting new courses in economic development, monetary policy, and multi-cultural and multi-ethnic coexistence 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 visit the research and development facility of a major American investor in Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir said that he did feel "any snub" because "maybe I have thick skin".

However the Prime Minister felt "pity" for the society because it was not able to distinguish the truth from propaganda.

On the fear that his presence at the convention might trigger a demonstration, Dr Mahathir said: "It is also their right in their country to demonstrate... I can't stop them".

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

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