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Malay rights stay (HL)

M.K. Megan

PUTRAJAYA, Thurs. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today assured the Malays that their rights and privileges will be protected, until they themselves say that they do not want the Government's help anymore.

The Prime Minister said the Government on its own would not take even one step backward in this matter.

He said: "There are some (Malays) who think they can progress on their own. They are mistaken. Without the Government's help, those who think they are strong will fall flat.

"We are not oppressing anyone by protecting the Malay rights. In fact, we want to develop this country. We want to even out the country's wealth fairly among all races."

Dr Mahathir was addressing a crowd of about 500 from 13 Malay organisations representing the business community, women and students. Each organisation submitted a memorandum criticising the National Economic Action Council II deputy chairman Datuk David Chua for his reported statement that the special Malay rights be abolished.

The statement was first reported in the August issue of the Far Eastern Economic Review.

However, Chua later clarified that he was talking about special assistance and affirmative action policies and not the rights of the Malays.

Speaking through a portable hailer, Dr Mahathir, who was visibly emotional, said he did not want racial misunderstanding and animosity in the country.

Applauded several times by the crowd, the Prime Minister said: "For that reason, all races in this country need to be careful when making statements. They have the right to make statements but it has to be done within closed-door meetings so that it could be discussed without anyone getting emotional.

"It may not be a big matter to those who are making such statements in the open, but for others it may bring a bigger meaning. We allow such open discussions, but only in closed-door meetings ... so that it would not trigger racial hatred.

"In Malaysia, we know that everyone has his (or her) own rights. Only in Malaysia are all races allowed to have their own schools and use their own language.

"They do not get this even in the developed countries," the Prime Minister said.

He said when the Malays opposed the Malayan Union before independence in 1957, they opposed all foreigners.

The Malays have never denied anyone their rights, as such no one should deny the Malays their rights and privileges.

"Of late, however, there is disunity among us (Malays) which meant we are weak.

"When we are weak, there are claims to drop the Malay rights."

But if and when a Malay leader does not get the people's support, it would be difficult to defend the position of the Malays.

"But Alhamdulillah, we are strong until now and I assure you all that we will defend our rights," he said.

The speech and handing over of the memorandums were done on the steps of his office at Putrajaya.

"This is a demonstration which is truly peaceful and without violence.

"We do not fight the police and security guards. It is not the Malaysian way."

(END)