

21/03/2000

`No intention of questioning loyalty'

Abdul Razak Ahmad; Sajahan Waheed

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the Government has no intention of questioning the loyalty of Malaysian Chinese following complaints of excessive foreign Chinese programmes on Astro.

"There should not be any accusations that the Government is doubtful of the Chinese," Dr Mahathir told a Press conference after chairing the Umno supreme council meeting in which the matter was raised.

Dr Mahathir clarified that the Government's only concern was that the Chinese should follow local news programmes for an accurate picture of events in the country.

Earlier this month, several parties had complained of excessive foreign Chinese news and entertainment programmes broadcast over the satellite pay channel.

"It is as though we are questioning the loyalty of the Malaysian Chinese.

"This is not true, but if we don't listen to our locally-produced news programmes, we won't get the right information about our country," he said.

Dr Mahathir, who is Umno president, said there was no intention to prevent the Chinese from watching the foreign programmes on Astro.

On the Sanggang by-election on April 1, Dr Mahathir urged the party not to underestimate the Opposition.

He said although it was only a by-election, the Opposition would go all out to win in order to prove that it was more popular.

"That is why we are focusing on Sanggang. If we don't, the Opposition will go all out to win in order to claim that support for Umno in Pahang has declined," said Dr Mahathir.

The Sanggang seat fell vacant after the death of Pahang State Executive Councillor Datuk Abdullah Kia on Feb 26.

Party vice-president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who is discharging the duties of deputy president, will head the Barisan Nasional's procession on nomination day tomorrow.

Dr Mahathir also advised Umno branches to be active at all times.

Dr Mahathir also said that certain quarters in Kelantan had been spreading slanderous remarks about how he purportedly asked the Saudi Arabian Government to arrest Malaysian Haj pilgrims who had overstayed in that country.

"They were there without the Haj visa, and this is against the law in Saudi Arabia," Dr Mahathir said.

He said although the Saudi authorities had not acted on this problem in the past several years, the large number of those who overstayed had prompted the Saudi authorities to take firm action.

On Feb 11, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Paduka Dr Abdul Hamid Othman was quoted as saying that there were about 3,000 Malaysian citizens in Saudi Arabia who had overstayed on their umrah visas.

"I received a report from the Consul-General in Jeddah which said that the conditions in the prison were pitiful," said Dr Mahathir.

As such, he said the Government decided to bring them back, pending the agreement of the Saudi authorities.

On the proposal by the Sungai Siput division at its meeting yesterday

that a person only be allowed to serve as Prime Minister for a maximum of 12 years, Dr Mahathir said: "That's their right to propose. Whether Umno accepts it or not depends on the party."

Dr Mahathir was also asked to comment on the possibility that Umno would amend the minimum requirement of nominations of candidates who wished to contest the post of party president from the current 30 per cent, or 50 of the 165 divisions nationwide.

"If we want to make changes, we must make amendments ... we cannot make amendments at this time," he said.

On whether he would seek to discuss ways to strengthen Malay unity during the Ruler's Council meeting on Wednesday, Dr Mahathir said the matter was not in the agenda, "but if it is raised by any quarters, we will discuss it".

(END)