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`Opposition promoting culture of hatred'

Saiful Azhar Abdullah in London

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday expressed concern over the Opposition's continuous attempts to propagating a culture of hatred towards Government leaders.

He said the culture had only succeeded in closing the people's minds and transforming some of them into fanatics.

Dr Mahathir said such a culture was being propagated in universities, schools and kindergartens by these groups.

Expressing worry that such a culture would create divisions in society, the Prime Minister said the Opposition had "distracted" the students from the original objective of acquiring knowledge and influenced them into scorning certain people in the country.

"We have found that pupils in schools are being taught to hate certain leaders... to tear pictures of certain leaders and step on them.

"Universities and schools are being used to sow the seeds of hatred towards certain people by some irresponsible parties," he told a Hari Raya gathering which was attended by Malaysians and students in the UK at Malaysia Hall yesterday.

Also present were his wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali and Malaysian High Commissioner to the UK and Eire Datuk Mohd Amir Jaafar.

Dr Mahathir reminded them that the consequences of such irresponsible activities would be detrimental to the country.

"We will have a society with closed minds, and unable to gauge what is wrong and right," he said.

The Prime Minister said it was important that the people open their minds to the views of others so that they would be able to differentiate between truth and untruth.

In the two-and-a-half hour dialogue, Dr Mahathir was asked to clarify a wide range of issues, including the sacking of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim as Deputy Prime Minister.

Dr Mahathir traced the chronology of events that led to Anwar's entry into Umno, the events that led to his sacking and the subsequent court case.

Asked about the sedition case against lawyer Karpal Singh, Dr Mahathir explained that everybody in Malaysia should be treated equally under the Law.

He said everybody was equal in Malaysia whether he was a lawyer or member of the Opposition or the Government.

Unfortunately, he said, there was a peculiar belief that members of the Opposition should be exempted from the law.

The Prime Minister denied allegations that the Government was muzzling opposition leaders as claimed by some.

Asked whether Umno would make some reforms following the outcome of the general election to make the party more relevant in the future, Dr Mahathir said Umno had undergone many changes in the past.

He spoke about the various development programmes introduced by the Government in the past to show that Umno had been continuously carrying out reform programmes.

Asked whether Malaysia would revise the peg on the ringgit, he said the Government might do so if the International Monetary Fund came up with a new financial regime.

Until then, he said, it would remain or else the financial speculators

would continue to play around with the currency.

Asked whether he planned to remain in the political limelight after his retirement, Dr Mahathir said he wanted to be out of the picture.

"I have no intention of becoming a Malaysian Senior Minister," he said.

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