

17 OCT 2000

Mahathir-Debate

PAS WANTS TO CAPITALISE ON DEBATE TO DISCREDIT UMNO, SAYS PM

PETALING JAYA, Oct 17 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister and Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said PAS appears enthusiastic about the proposed debate on Malay special rights only because the opposition party can use it to discredit Umno among the non-Malays.

"PAS proposes this (debate) not so much for the sake of the debate itself but just to put Umno to test," he said.

Dr Mahathir was asked at a media conference here on calls by certain quarters that the proposed debate, between Umno Youth chief Datuk Hishammuddin Tun Hussein and his PAS Youth opposite number Mahfuz Omar, be called off.

Since Umno would touch on Malay special rights and privileges at the debate, PAS would bank on antagonising the Chinese and other non-Malays and making them less supportive of Umno.

"This is their objective, it's not that they really want to debate," Dr Mahathir told the media after delivering a key-note address at a K-economy conference organised by the MCA English-speaking membership bureau here today.

The date and venue for the Hishammuddin-Mahfuz debate on Malay special rights have yet to be fixed.

Some Umno and PAS leaders had earlier urged that the debate be called off saying it would merely be a futile exercise and could not do much to solve problems.

Dr Mahathir had said that he agreed that it be held so that the people could be enlightened on the privileges and the future of the Malays.

While Terengganu Menteri Besar and PAS deputy president Abdul Hadi had said he was all for the debate to seek truth, his Kelantan counterpart and head of PAS council of scholars Datuk Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat questioned the wisdom of having one.

Dr Mahathir said if Umno were not to accept the challenge to the debate, it would be made to appear as a coward and PAS would in turn make that into yet another issue.

However, Dr Mahathir said, Umno was willing to hear public views on the pros and cons of proceeding with the proposed debate.

-- BERNAMA

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