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PM assures non-Muslims (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Continued support for the Government will enable it to stem racial prejudice, besides helping to promote lasting peace and harmony in the country, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

This, the Prime Minister said, would be the best assurance anyone could get against any form of persecution.

Dr Mahathir said this when asked by reporters what kind of assurance the Government could give to non-Muslims after the slaying of two non-Muslim security officers following the arms heist last week.

"If you ensure this Government continues to remain in power, that will be the best assurance for non-Muslims," Dr Mahathir said.

He was speaking to newsmen after opening the Malaysian Structural Steel Convention and Exhibition at Seri Kembangan. He said: "Some non-Muslims want to play with fire ... they are saying they can support this kind of people, and not get hurt.

"If you support the wrong kind of ideas, you will only get hurt," he said.

In the incident, Special Branch Kpl R. Sagadevan and the army's Special Operations Force personnel Mathew a/k Medan from the Sungai Udang camp in Malacca were tortured and murdered.

This took place after the arms heist on July 2 by the Al-Ma'unah group at two army camps where they seized an assortment of weapons and thousands of rounds of ammunition. It then held a five-day standoff with the security forces at the group's hideout in Sauk, Perak, before being captured on July 6.

He said the killings showed that certain quarters were bent on spreading the politics of hate. "That is why we have always been against this politics of hate. They instigate hate against people in order to win votes for themselves and this is the ultimate result."

Dr Mahathir said certain quarters had also attempted to create hatred for the Government and they in return would support such deviationist groups to hate the Government.

"As far as we are concerned, this is not what we are taught to do. This is not our religion. This has deviated from the teachings of Islam."

He did not rule out the possibility of some quarters going all out to justify the intentions of such deviationist groups to the people just to undermine the Government.

He said it was the people, and not him, who could guarantee continued peace and stability.

Yesterday, Dr Mahathir said the the Government, led by Umno, would not tolerate efforts by any group to persecute or kill anyone simply because of differences in race and religion.

The Government wants to maintain stability in the country and does not want to see Muslims or non-Muslims killed.

The Government's approach is different compared with some other political parties which instil hatred against the Government to win votes.

He was also asked whether the Al-Ma'unah group had demanded that Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim be freed from prison.

"They did not make any such demand but they wanted this Government to resign."

Asked to comment on "predictions" by the US intelligence community that there would be political uncertainty and instability in Malaysia after his

retirement, Dr Mahathir said this was a move to destabilise the country.

The group hopes to see such events take place in Malaysia and other stable countries.

"That is what they expect and what they would like (to see)... they will try to destabilise any stable country and see people fight each other, kill each other ... they would then say that you do not know how to run your country."

The Far Eastern Economic Review in its July 13 edition said a conference organised in Washington on June 22 had concluded that Malaysia could face considerable political uncertainty, including infighting in Umno, once Dr Mahathir retired.

The conference, entitled "Prospects for a Post-Mahathir Malaysia", was attended by officials from the Central Intelligence Agency and the US departments of State and Defence as well as academics, economists and former American diplomats and journalists in Malaysia.

The magazine said the conference was held because the US government wanted to make sure it was not hit with any big surprises in Malaysia when Dr Mahathir eventually left office.

The panellists also predicted that new economic turmoil would hit Malaysia between three and five years in the post-Dr Mahathir era owing to Malaysia's growing fiscal debt brought on by the Government's move to rescue troubled companies and the minimal restructuring of the economy in the wake of the 1997 financial crisis.

On this, Dr Mahathir said: "Their own countries used money to bail out their companies ... and they seem to be doing quite well.

"(for instance)... their motor corporation, even the LTCM (Long Term Capital Management Fund) which went bankrupt... they bailed them out and they said it was good for their country.

"So, it must be good for us also because we are copying them."

Dr Mahathir said these findings did not hold water as there were able leaders who could take over the reins from him and his successors too would be able to steer the country towards continued development and stability.

On the group's conclusion that Anwar's political career "wasn't necessarily finished", Dr Mahathir said the Americans may know something which he did not.

Asked to respond on the conference, the acting public affairs officer at the US embassy here, Margot Carrington, said: "We have no comments on the matter."

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