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PM: Resignation not the best way

Ahmad A. Talib; Cheah Chor Sooi in Cambridge

EXPECTING a Cabinet minister to resign every time an issue affecting his ministry surfaces may not necessarily be the best way to solve the problem, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

The Prime Minister said those directly guilty of the wrongdoing should be the ones made accountable as this would be more fair. The law should be applied on those actually guilty of the offence, he said.

Dr Mahathir said this during an interactive session with participants of the "Malaysia in the New Millennium" conference organised by the Cambridge University Malaysia Society at the Lady Mitchell Hall, University of Cambridge.

A student had asked why Cabinet ministers were not made responsible for the inefficiencies of departments under them and cited Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik as an example following the crackdown on "flying licences".

Dr Mahathir said making ministers pay for the wrongdoings of others would not be correct, especially when the guilty ones were allowed to go free.

During the 40-minute dialogue, Dr Mahathir took several questions ranging from the rule of law, the quality of English among students and Malaysians in general, his continued criticism of Pas for the opposition party's politicking to his retirement plans, an issue he had dealt with many times before.

The Prime Minister said he had wanted to retire at the end of 1998 just after the Commonwealth Games but was forced to stay on to ensure a recovery of the economy following the 1997 crisis.

"Every time someone asked me to step down, a lot more insisted that I should stay," Dr Mahathir said to applause from the audience.

The exchanges between the students and the Prime Minister were lively and drew a lot of attention.

Asked for his views on this at a Press conference later, Dr Mahathir said he welcomed all questions as they enabled him to address misgivings and misconceptions.

For instance, the Prime Minister explained the claims by former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim that he was poisoned with arsenic, a claim which was later proven to be false.

"But some people believed the claim even after it was proven to be false and baseless," he said.

A student also commented that there appeared to be a tendency for some people to blame everything on the Government.

"I am sure some people will blame the Government if it rains during the Formula One in Sepang later this month," the student said.

In his response which was greeted with applause, Dr Mahathir said:

"Well, we will make sure we get the best bomoh to drive the rain away."

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