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PM: Don't take part in demos

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KOTA KINABALU, Fri. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today advised people not to participate in demonstrations expected on Aug 4 when the High Court delivers its judgment in former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's sodomy trial.

"I advise the people not to attend the demonstrations as it will destroy them and affect the nation's economy. Their actions will bring losses to petty traders who are unable to conduct business during demonstrations.

"Petty traders depend on their daily income and this (demonstrations) is a process of oppressing the poor," the Prime Minister told reporters when asked about his advice to those who planned to attend the demonstrations.

He was speaking at a Press conference at the Pan Pacific Sutera Hotel here at the end of his three-day visit to the State.

Dr Mahathir said demonstrators also prevented university students from studying.

"Then they protest about the establishment of private educational institutions which costs money. Those who study at public universities at times do not even have to pay fees. So they enjoy participating in demonstrations because they have nothing to lose," he said.

Dr Mahathir said some people participated in demonstrations to allegedly uphold the rule of law but when the law awarded judgments against those they supported, such gatherings were held.

"Although they uphold the rule of law, they feel it should be applied to other people, and not to them. If the law is applied to them, they break it by demonstrating," he said.

Dr Mahathir also spoke about democracy and how it was interpreted.

"It is easy to practise liberal democracy when the people understand the limitations of democracy and do not take action which could affect their lives (in a negative manner).

"But in some countries which try to practice democracy, the people hold demonstrations and strikes until economic activities are hampered. This means the country cannot be developed, the people become poor and then they go against the Government. This is anarchy and not democracy," he said.

Meanwhile, asked to comment on the Terengganu Government's decision to ban women from participating in Quran-reading competitions on the basis that a woman's voice is aurat (exposed parts of the human body), Dr Mahathir said:

"It is their right ... that is their interpretation of what is aurat. Good Muslims, men and women, should not raise their voice, but they claim a woman's voice can raise desire (nafsu).

"We concentrate when we listen to the Quran being read, but apparently Pas people in Terengganu cannot listen to a woman recite the Quran."

In Malacca, students and teachers were today warned not to be involved in any illegal gathering or risk stern action, including sacking.

Deputy Education Minister Datuk Hon Choon Kim said appropriate action under the stipulated provisions would be taken against those found to be involved, without fear or favour.

"Stay away from such gatherings or face the music. Our officers will be working closely with the police to monitor such activities. Those involved will be dealt with severely."

Hon also reminded university lecturers and Education Ministry staff to

stay away from such activities. He said this after performing the ground-breaking ceremony of the new block of Sekolah Menengah Tinggi Cina near here.

Meanwhile, Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Norian Mai had advised Anwar's supporters and sympathisers not to resort to any unlawful activity.

Norian said the court's decision should be respected, adding that police were taking measures to ensure that peace and security were maintained.

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