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PM: Public statements could provoke others

PENANG, Sat. - The Prime Minister has simple advice for the Malaysian Chinese Organisation Election Appeals Committee (Suqiu) if it has problems about the country's race relations:

"Don't make public statements because this can cause a lot of irrational action."

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad told a Press conference that if Malays and Indians also formed a similar committee to make similar demands, problems would arise between the races.

Speaking to reporters after opening the Gerakan national delegates conference, Dr Mahathir said if the committee had any complaints, they should go to representatives of the Chinese community in the Government at state or national levels.

"Go and talk to them quietly."

Nevertheless, Dr Mahathir said the Suqiu Committee now had a better understanding of Malay rights after he met them following a dispute over the issue.

"So, I will not say more than that now," he told a Press conference after opening the Gerakan national delegates conference here.

Elaborating on his speech when opening the conference where he touched on vernacular schools, Dr Mahathir emphasised the Government's stand not to set up establishments for different races, which he described as "very unhealthy."

That was why colleges are placed in the same campus where university students stay in the same hostel, he said.

"We want people to be together," he said. "All these things are meant to integrate. But we are not taking things away from the people. We are just bringing them together."

On a Gerakan Youth resolution asking that the Government amend the Universities and University Colleges Act, Dr Mahathir said Government universities were financed by the people.

Although the students pay fees, the Government footed 90 per cent of the bill, underscoring the fact that the money was for the purpose of education.

"If we don't want to study but only demonstrate," he said, "then there is no point to enrol in a university. Anyone without a brain can demonstrate, it is very easy to demonstrate... it does not require high intellect."

Dr Mahathir also replied to a question that former MCA president Datuk Lee San Choon, in a recent interview, claimed that the MCA was "stabbed in the back" by Umno during the 1982 general election.

"I don't want to comment but I personally campaigned for Lee San Choon," he said. "In fact, he won the seat (in the Seremban parliamentary seat, defeating DAP's Dr Chen Man Hin)."

Dr Mahathir said he still remembered the speech he gave during the campaign then.

"I told him (Lee) that there was no need to shout to tell me something because I was seated next to him," he said. "If he had whispered, I could have heard that too."

Dr Mahathir also refuted claims by the Opposition that he was wasting tax payers' money by spending more time on Umno politics.

He chided them for not commenting when "I worked practically 24 hours a

day."

"This is beyond the working hours that I should be working," he said.

"But they never commented about that."

Elaborating his work ethics for the past four decades, especially since becoming Prime Minister in 1981, Dr Mahathir said he would work a minimum of 16 hours daily, usually more than that.

"The Opposition gets my services free for an extra eight hours daily," he said. "If you add up that eight hours extra that I worked for the Government every day for the past 19 years, they will know that I have been underpaid."

Besides, Dr Mahathir said he was perhaps the only person in the Government who had worked until he was 75-years old without any pension.

"(Some) Judges, when they reach 55, they get pension, they get gratuity, then they work as judges until they are 65.

They get another pension and they get another gratuity ... two pensions."

"But my pay is lower than people who work under me like the Petronas chairman or whatever. They get about 30,40,50 thousand ringgit a month.

I get RM16,000 a month...I get less, even if you compare the salary of our neighbours, you know lah!"

Dr Mahathir said he wanted to know who was it that claimed that he was wasting taxpayers money.

"I want to see what he is doing for the Government," he added.

Why not claim overtime, one reporter quipped.

Chuckling, Dr Mahathir said: "Yes, if I could claim overtime, double pay on public holidays - if I add that up, I think the Government owes me millions of ringgit."

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