

13/10/2000

Talks with Malaysian students in British universities `went well'

PETALING JAYA, Thurs. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said his dialogues with Malaysian students in Britain last week were fruitful although attempts were made to persuade them to give the event a miss.

The Prime Minister said he took the opportunity replying to various questions from the floor although it was apparent that many of those asking the questions were pro-Opposition students.

At the dialogue at University Manchester Institute of Science and Technology, Dr Mahathir said it was a full-house event although some Pakistani students had earlier tried to prevent their Malaysian counterparts from attending.

"At Cambridge, the response was also good, although participants had to pay to attend.

"From the questions posed, it could be seen that the students were DAP and Pas supporters."

For example, Dr Mahathir said he touched on the spread of cholera caused by poor water supply in Kelantan during the dialogue only to have a student raising questions about the outbreak of the coxsackie virus in some areas.

"But this disease cannot be overcome just by supplying clean water. It is different from cholera, so we can see many who asked are influenced by the Opposition."

He was speaking at the Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah airport in Subang upon his return from a 10-day working visit to Britain and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Dr Mahathir said some European students and those from Amnesty International also staged a demonstration while he was in London.

The Prime Minister said they demanded the release of jailed former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Chiding them for practising double standards, the Prime Minister said they were fond of talking about "the rule of law" but only when it suited their cause or agenda.

"To them, the rule of law is when government ministers are arrested and charged in court but not when it involves their people, especially if they are found guilty."

Dr Mahathir said he responded to this issue at the dialogue, telling the students that he had no power to arrest or free anyone from jail.

"In Malaysia, if someone breaks the law and is sentenced by the court, the Prime Minister cannot rescind the order."

On efforts by certain quarters, including NGOs and the Opposition, to smear his name overseas, Dr Mahathir said it was their right to act that way.

"For the Opposition, sowing and spreading lies and not holding to the truth, are their normal traits, either at home or abroad."

Asked for his assessment of Bosnia today, Dr Mahathir said the country had made quite a good recovery. However, racial sentiments still existed, he said.

"They have rebuilt Sarajevo ... the situation is calm but politics based on ethnic and racial sentiments still exist," he said of the country which would go to the polls on Nov 11.

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