

07/11/2000

Why Opposition supporters flout the law

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Opposition supporters are increasingly engaging in unlawful acts to force the Government to take action against them.

"But when action is taken, they will tell their friends overseas to condemn the Malaysian Government," Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad told a Press conference after opening of the 40th Commonwealth Telecommunications Council (CTC) meeting at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel here today.

He was asked about the attempts by some people to carry out an illegal gathering at Jalan Kebun in Shah Alam yesterday. The police dispersed the gathering and detained over 100 people for illegal gathering.

Dr Mahathir said Opposition supporters talked about the need to follow the rule of law, "but when we (the Government) follow the rule of law, they condemn (us)."

Citing an example, Dr Mahathir said the Government could, if it wanted to, place Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim in detention indefinitely under the Internal Security Act.

"That can be said to be permanent, where we can renew (the detention order) after every two years."

However, the Government allowed the police to take legal action against Anwar, with the trial proceedings held in English, Dr Mahathir said, to accommodate the foreign media.

"After the one-year trial where the defendant was represented by nine famous lawyers ... they still say there was no due process," he added.

Dr Mahathir asked aloud whether due process meant asking for Anwar's retrial. He said Anwar was allowed to appeal and he had in fact done so.

"That is (considered) a retrial," he said, adding that it seemed as if those who criticised the Government had no understanding of the rule of law.

"We are sad because these are the kind of people who lead a country which is a world power," said Dr Mahathir, referring to the group of seven US Congressmen who filed a petition calling on the Malaysian Government to either drop all charges against Anwar or hold a retrial.

Dr Mahathir said people normally sought outside assistance when all other avenues had been exhausted. He said this was not so in Anwar's case.

"There are the courts, the elections, and they can test whether the Government is supported by the people or not," he said, adding that Malaysia was not a country where Opposition politicians could not win an election.

"They have taken over two States, and two other States were at one time under them ... but still we are prepared to go to the people and ask them 'do you want us or don't you want us, if you don't want us throw us out'."

Dr Mahathir said he did not feel that the Opposition and its supporters would stop their negative actions against the country.

"The most important thing (for them) is to create problems for the country so that investors and tourists will not come."

Citing an example, Dr Mahathir said the Asian Wall Street Journal newspaper published a report which said Malaysia was the most "un-free" country in the world.

This, he said, was despite the fact that the newspaper was printed in Malaysia and that the Government "has never 'touched' what they said," said Dr Mahathir.

He added that if one were to look into the back issues of the Asian Wall Street Journal, one would not find any report on Malaysia which acknowledged Malaysia's efforts.

"But they still call us an `un-free' country."

On the other hand, the Business Traveller magazine, said Dr Mahathir, reported that Kuala Lumpur was a "secret" city because people did not know how good it is.

"The reason why they don't know is because we have a bad international Press coverage," said Dr Mahathir, adding that regardless of their reports, "Malaysia would speak its mind".

(END)