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Mahathir-Nanyang

DR MAHATHIR WARNS THOSE WHO TRY TO DRAG HIM INTO CONTROVERSY

KUALA LUMPUR, June 23 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today issued a strong warning against those who try to drag him into the controversial takeover of the Chinese dailies, Nanyang Siang Pau and China Press by the MCA investment arm, Huaren Holdings Sdn Bhd.

He disclosed that there were attempts to drag him into the controversy aimed at instigating the Chinese community to hate him and the government.

"It's not that I want to campaign for Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik (MCA president), but I am truly disappointed by the attempts to drag me into the controversy over the Nanyang deal. They try to instigate the Chinese community against the government," he said in his winding-up speech on the last day of the Umno general assembly at the Putra World Trade Centre, here.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president, said it was implied that the acquisition by MCA was upon his instruction so that the Chinese community who were angry with the party would also be angry with the government.

He said the efforts to involve him in the takeover were also aimed at diverting the Chinese support in favour of the opposition party, DAP led by Lim Kit Siang.

Dr Mahathir said he had never directed the MCA to buy over Nanyang and China Press but felt that there was nothing wrong if both the newspapers were owned by any Chinese political party.

"If we (Umno) can buy the Malay newspapers why can't the MCA do it?", he said referring to the Malay daily Utusan Malaysia which were indirectly owned by the Umno investment arm.

He said it was not fair if Utusan were controlled so that they would not be extreme in playing up racial issues while the Chinese newspapers were allowed to incite hatred against the Malays.

"We cannot have one race which are free to spread all kinds of slanders and accusations discrediting the government while the reins on another race are being held tightly so that they cannot move," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the writers from these Chinese newspapers claimed they were independent but had never supported the government and the views expressed in Nanyang and China Press were often anti-government.

Dr Mahathir said the controversy over the takeover of the two Chinese dailies could possibly be because they did not want others to know about what were being written in these newspapers.

"Could it be that they have things that we don't know about, because we can't read Chinese. We can't say much in Utusan because they know (the language), what they write in Nanyang and China Press we don't know," he said.

He said since the by-election for the Lunas state seat in Kedah last year, Nanyang and China Press had instigated the Chinese against the government.

In the by-election, the opposition wrested the seat from Barisan Nasional (BN).

Dr Mahathir said his statement had also been manipulated by the Chinese press when the Malaysian Chinese Organisations Election Appeals Committee (Suqiu) demanded that the special priveleges of the Malays be abolished.

"In my speech I said that their (Suqiu's) demands were similar to those of the communists. They immediately claimed that I considered all the

Chinese as communists, they inflamed the sentiments of the Chinese so that they would oppose and hate the government," he said.

The Chinese newspapers, particularly Nanyang and China Press, he said, also wrote to instigate the Chinese against him and the BN with the hope that the community's support would go back to the DAP.

This was because the opposition party led by Lim Kit Siang had suffered a major defeat and had lost the Chinese votes during the 1999 general election, he said.

The Prime Minister said that as a result of his reminder, he was misconstrued as hating the Chinese community in general.

"I have many Chinese friends, I even have a Chinese daughter-in-law. I am not anti-Chinese but I want justice for the Malays, for all Malaysians," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the government would face a similar situation with the Chinese press following the relocation of Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina Puay Chai, Damansara and the proposal on the setting up of the Vision School concept.

He said that in the controversy over the relocation of the school, the government was criticised for relocating the school although the majority of the pupils and their parents wanted it to be relocated.

He said the proposed establishment of the Vision Schools was necessary so that Chinese children could be close to and study together with the Malay and Indian children to promote solidarity.

"Now a new township has developed where there is not a single Malay there. If there is only a Chinese school in the new township, then Chinese children would no longer be close with Malay and Indian children. This is bad for racial solidarity in our country," he said.

Nanyang and China Press had also played up this issue, the Prime Minister said.

He said Malaysia was the most liberal country because it was the only country in the world with a Chinese community that allowed the setting up of Chinese schools with government funding.

-- BERNAMA

MHI ZS AO