

26 JAN 2001

Mahathir-Suqiu

GOVT STUDYING IMPLICATION OF THE REMAINING SUQIU DEMANDS

SIK, Kedah, Jan 26 (Bernama) -- The Government is studying the implications of the remaining demands of the Chinese Associations Election Appeals Committee (Suqiu), Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said if any of these remaining demands could jeopardise national peace and wellbeing then the government would ask that these too be not raised again.

"If there is any that can affect national peace and wellbeing, then discussions will be held so that they will not be raised again," the Prime Minister said.

Of its original 83 demands, Suqiu has set aside seven which touched on the Special Rights and Privileges of the Malays and Bumiputeras.

Dr Mahathir was speaking at a dialogue with Sik and Baling Umno division members at the Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Agama Sik here.

Replying to a committee member of the Sik Umno Division Zulkifli Abd Kadir, Dr Mahathir said the special position of the Malays and Bumiputeras could not be questioned anymore as this was enshrined in the Federal Constitution.

Suqiu had accepted this and would not raise it again, he said.

He said Suqiu had also accepted the fact that the government provided aid to Malays and Bumiputeras so that they could match the achievements of other races.

"Moreover the government's efforts can help safeguard national peace unlike in a neighbouring country where riots had broken out because the indigenous people had been left behind economically."

"Let no one restrict the government's efforts to help Bumiputeras and Malays and now Suqiu acknowledges and accepts this matter," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Suqiu also accepted the fact that the Federal Constitution guaranteed freedom of worship and recognised Islam as the official religion of this country.

Replying to another question from Zulkifli, the Prime Minister reiterated his stand that those who sought the help of foreign countries to pressure this country were traitors to the race.

"They are calling in the colonialists when we are opposing the colonialists. They are betrayers... and traitors to the race. There is no place in this country for betrayers and traitors," Dr Mahathir said.

Replying to a member of the Sik Umno Youth Committee, Abd Razak Bahari, the Prime Minister said the government was looking into ways of helping rubber smallholders facing problems due to falling rubber prices.

He said the fall in price was due to synthetic rubber and over supply of natural rubber in the market.

On the claim that young people were not very interested in joining Umno, Dr Mahathir said efforts were being made to reach out to them.

On the withdrawal of rubber replanting aid as raised by the member of the Sik Wanita Umno Division committee, the Prime Minister said he would study the matter and restore the aid if necessary.

Earlier at a get-together with the Umno leaders, Dr Mahathir said he initially wanted his meeting with Umno Division leaders to be a closed door affair as he did not want others to hear about family matters.

However this was difficult because non-members and members of the press were also present.

His meeting with members of the Sik and Baling Divisions is the second following his meeting yesterday with those of the Pokok Sena and Padang Terap divisions.

Dr Mahathir is on a nationwide tour of Umno divisions to get feedback on party problems and suggestions from grassroots.

-- BERNAMA

JM AAM