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Mahathir-Loans

MAHATHIR DENIES MALAYSIA'S LOANS AMOUNTED TO RM1 TRILLION

KOTA BAHARU, April 20 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today refuted the opposition's allegation that loans taken out by Malaysia amounted to RM1 trillion.

Dr Mahathir said that the matter was raised in parliament recently.

"I would like to know how they've come up with such an amount. RM1 trillion is equivalent to RM1,000 billion...a very large figure," he told reporters after launching the national-level Malaysian Unit Trust Week 2001 here.

The government and the private sector had taken out loans totaling not more than RM100 billion, he said.

The prime minister was asked to elaborate on his speech in which he touched on the issue.

He said that the country was not facing any problem in making repayments for its loans.

"There are times when we make repayments earlier than scheduled," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that Malaysia's capability in managing its economy and its loans had saved the country from having to be indebted to others including the International Monetary Fund (IMF) during the economic crisis.

Asked to comment on Malaysia's move to temporarily close down its consulate office in Pontianak last Tuesday due to possible threats to the safety of its staff, Dr Mahathir said that the government would find out why there were such threats against the Malaysian mission.

The temporary closure of the consulate office and evacuation of its 13 staff and family members were conducted after having been informed of such threats by the West Kalimantan authorities.

Referred to the comments of the Malaysian Human Rights Commission (Suhakam) that there were in existence various restrictive laws, the prime minister said: "That's their views. While certain groups try to exert their freedom, others will have to give up their freedom".

For instance, he said, street demonstrations would not only pose a threat to the government but also to traders whose businesses would be affected.

"The government also needs to protect the freedom of these people. If they wish to hold demonstrations in the middle of the ocean that's fine," he said.

Among the laws mentioned by Suhakam are the Internal Security Act 1960, Sedition Act 1948, Official Secrets Act 1972, and the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971.

Replying to a related question, Dr Mahathir said that the government would study the call by Suhakam for permits to be issued for static assemblies like in stadiums, halls and private premises.

"In upholding democracy, it does not mean that the people can do everything they want. Like in one other country, the leader was brought down through demonstrations.

"In this country, they do not wish to hold demonstrations in specified places but on the streets," he said.

Asked to elaborate on his speech where he mentioned that Bumiputeras were slow in signing up for unit trust schemes compared to other races, Dr Mahathir said it was due to several factors including the fact they they could not afford to do so, doubts over the schemes and their attitude in

always looking for quick returns.

"It seems as if they do not think of the future. They only think of the present...to invest today and wanting to get their returns on the same day," he said.

-- BERNAMA

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