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Parliament-Unity

MALAYSIA IS A LIBERAL COUNTRY- DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, March 27 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today Malaysia is a liberal country which allows its people of various races to practise their respective religions and do things in line with their own language and culture.

There would be no problem if each race forged unity within itself as such unity was limited to safeguarding its own interests, he said.

"It does not become a problem because the unity is limited to safeguarding its own interest during negotiations among the various races," he said.

"Even though united along racial lines, in questions affecting the country they will come together as Malaysians," he said when replying to Dr Tan Seng Giaw (DAP-Kepong) in the Dewan Rakyat during Question Time.

Dr Tan asked as to what would become to the concept of the Malaysian race which was projected in the past when at present each race was asked to unite along community lines.

Dr Mahathir said there would be no problem if Malays were united, as such unity was limited to defending their rights which were enshrined in the Constitution.

Dr Mahathir said Malays were only demanding what had become their rights and did not touch the rights of others.

As such even though Islam was the state religion, it could also be practised by other people and even though Bahasa Malaysia which was based on the Malay Language was the national language, other languages could be used up to the school level and in their respective dealings.

"We have no objections. We are a multiracial country which is very liberal, more liberal than the United States," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the people of the United States comprised various races but the national language was English and the language taught at schools was also English and there could be no other languages receiving support from that country's government.

Unlike in this country, he said the government aided Chinese and Tamil schools and apart from that helped in various other activities such as in the building of temples and churches.

"We are more liberal than other governments of the world and we can be proud of it," Dr Mahathir said.

On the concept of the Malaysian race, the Prime Minister said if Malaysia wanted to have a pure Malaysian race, the best way of bringing about this was probably through the process of assimilation that was absorbing non-Malays and turning them into Malays and converting them to Islam.

"But we are more liberal here. We do not want them to change their religion, names or their languages but in matters affecting the common interest of the country they will have to unite as the Malaysian people," he said.

Earlier when replying to Datuk Ruhanie Haji Ahmad (BN-Parit Sulong), Dr Mahathir said Malay unity as meant by Umno was not unity in totality to the extent that they could not have any dealings or cooperation with non-Malays at all.

"It is not to cause enmity with non-Malays or to oppose them or go to war with them," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Malay unity was to defend four things which were

recognised as their rights as already enshrined in the Constitution -- Malays as the original people of the Malay states had special rights as Malaysian citizens, Bahasa Melayu is recognised as the national language, Islam as the official religion and the Malay Rulers as constitutional monarchs in the states which formed part of Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir said the challenge made against these four things threatened all Malays be they from Umno, PAS or other other parties.

"Hence defending these rights does not benefit Umno from the aspect of party politics. Those benefiting will be all the Malays and all of them should be involved in defending these rights," he said.

He said without the participation of the Malays from PAS, it would be perceived that actually PAS did not agree to the four things mentioned earlier.

"If PAS appears to be willing to drop the four things and Keadilan (Parti Keadilan Nasional) denies it is a Malay party, then it will be difficult for Umno alone to defend the rights successfully," Dr Mahathir said.

The Prime Minister said Umno did not reject national unity and by defending Malay rights it was also not jeopardising national unity but in fact strengthening national unity.

He said if PAS Malays isolated themselves from Umno Malays and other Malays, national unity would be incomplete as PAS Malays were not in it.

Dr Mahathir said, "PAS will not be wiped out if PAS Malays united with Umno Malays in defending Malay rights. In other matters PAS can continue to be hostile to Umno."

Recalling the vital role Malay unity played in the struggle against the Malayan Union, Dr Mahathir said at that time nearly all the Malays were united under Umno and the colonial rulers had to bow to Umno's demands.

He said if at that time, there had been this clear disunity as at present, the colonial rulers would not have entertained the Malay demands and the condition that Malay rights be protected would also have gone unheeded.

He said the fact that Malay unity under Umno did not jeopardise national unity was clearly demonstrated when Chinese and Indians joined the Malays in demanding independence and accepted the condition for the protection of Malay rights and privileges.

He said national unity was also demonstrated as the non-Malay rights were also guaranteed in the Constitution.

"Hence Malay unity is good for Malaysia and will contribute to national unity," he said.

To a supplementary question from Ruhanie as to whether the conditions imposed by PAS for the meeting with Umno showed that PAS was under pressure from non-Malays to avoid the Malay unity dialogue, Dr Mahathir said he did not know as to whether PAS was being pressured by non-Malays or by its own members.

The Prime Minister said the conditions imposed for the meeting were clearly not related to the question of unity still Umno did not reject them, so that no one would have the opportunity of accusing Umno that it did not want Malay unity.

"We (Umno) want this unity...for the limited purpose, I mentioned earlier," he added.

-- BERNAMA

HS AAM