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Mahathir-Nanyang

NANYANG ISSUE SETTLED, MCA SHOULD NOW CONSOLIDATE, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, June 25 (Bernama) -- The Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said MCA members must consolidate themselves as the issue over the purchase of Nanyang Press Holdings Bhd by the party's investment arm, Huaren Holdings Sdn Bhd, has now been settled.

"They have decided now and the majority, whether it is small or big, has approved (the purchase of Nanyang Press).

"I do hope that this does not become a divisive thing in their politics because this issue has been settled and they should now go on consolidating," he said.

Dr Mahathir was commenting on the outcome of yesterday's MCA extraordinary general meeting (EGM) which voted in favour of the deal at a media conference after opening the 20th Al Baraka Symposium for Islamic Economy here today,

The three-day conference, organised by Dallah Albaraka (Malaysia) Holdings Sdn Bhd, is the first of such symposium held outside West Asia.

At the MCA EGM yesterday, a total of 1,176 delegates or 53.3 per cent of the 2,216 delegates present, voted in favour of the deal while 1,019 or 46.2 per cent, opposed it. There were 12 spoilt votes and nine abstentions.

The Nanyang deal turned into a controversy drawing criticisms from many Chinese groups as well as from within the MCA itself.

MCA deputy president Datuk Lim Ah Lek and vice-presidents Datuk Chua Jui Meng and Datuk Chan Kong Choy were the most notable critics of the deal and were among the eight Central Committee (CC) members who voted against the takeover at last month's CC meeting.

The remaining 32 CC members voted in favour of it.

Nanyang Press Holdings publishes the vernacular newspapers Nanyang Siang Pau and China Press.

The dissenting group in the MCA then proceeded with roadshows to explain to party members the implications of the transaction, which further divided the party.

In jest, Dr Mahathir said: "I'm quite sure that Dr Ling (MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik) would not take revenge on people who don't support him."

Dr Mahathir said what was important was that the party must now consolidate.

Asked if the issue would cause a backlash to the MCA in view of the opposition by the Chinese community to Nanyang's purchase, the prime minister said he would not know because they were people claiming that whatever they said reflected the views of the Chinese community.

"The Suqiu, the Chinese school teachers... everytime they talk is about the Chinese community, I don't know whether it is true or not, but what they are trying to do of course is to get the Chinese community to once again oppose the government and support the DAP," he said.

The prime minister said the opposition were very unhappy because the 1999 general election showed the Chinese community's overwhelming support for the governing Barisan Nasional government that for the first time they had rejected DAP strongman Lim Kit Siang and Karpal Singh.

Dr Mahathir said the DAP was now working with Suqiu (the Malaysian Chinese Organisations' Election Appeals Committee, Chinese school teachers and some Chinese organisations by rekindling issues already settled to show that the government was anti-Chinese.

He said the government had done a lot for the Chinese community and was also being very liberal by allowing the Chinese to have their own schools and use their own language as well as enjoying so much freedom and liberty in Malaysia.

Asked whether he supported the idea of one group controlling all the newspapers in the country, Dr Mahathir said he did not support such an idea and thought that everybody should have the chance to have a stake in a newspaper.

He noted that many of the Chinese newspapers were very pro-opposition as if they were run by the opposition as they also provided special columns dedicated for the opposition.

"Anything at all that is good for the opposition, they will play up. I think they want to see that the Chinese community doesn't support the government, so they play up issues during the election in Lunas, for example," he said.

The prime minister advised Nanyang Press Holdings to ensure its newspapers reported the truth.

"Those at the newspapers should report the truth and always report the truth, don't have your agenda and twist the report in order to treat your agenda. And that goes to every newspapers, locals as well as foreign," he said.

Dr Mahathir, who was also asked on the latest development relating to his expressed desire to appoint Chinese political and press secretaries, said he needed to have those officers to communicate with the Chinese press.

"It is already been finalised and (their appointments) will soon be announced," he added.

-- BERNAMA

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