

15 MAR 2001

Mahathir-Clashes

OPPOSITION INSTIGATING POOR CITIZENS TO PROTEST

KUALA LIPIS, March 15 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the opposition is now focusing attention on poor citizens by instigating them to protest against the government.

He said the instigation was being done so that these citizens would protest against the government, which the opposition claimed, was ignoring the welfare of the poor.

Dr Mahathir was speaking to reporters after a closed-door meeting with Umno members from the Lipis and Raub divisions here.

"We can see how they are focusing on squatter areas and sympathising with them (squatters) by visiting the sick and injured in the hospital," he said.

Describing the act as a ploy by the opposition to gain political mileage, Dr Mahathir said it was being done without any humanitarian consideration for others.

"They are so anxious now to show sympathy for the so-called poor....as if there are a lot of poor people," he added.

On rumours circulating, following clashes between two groups of residents in Jalan Klang Lama, Dr Mahathir said they were created by certain groups whose background was unknown.

He said this group was deliberately playing up stories that hundreds of Malays were killed just to arouse the anger of the Malays.

"I don't know, maybe such stories are being circulated among the Indians too, hoping that such riots will continue. We know if such riots are allowed to continue, as is the case in another country, there is a possibility the government can be toppled...this is the political aspiration of the opposition," he stressed.

Dr Mahathir added that the people should not create rumours as those who do so, were doing it for a particular reason.

He said, making an accusation that the number of casualties following the clashes exceeded six deaths, not only showed that the inventor of the news was ill-informed but was also creating his own stories.

On the position of Datuk Osu Sukam as Sabah Chief Minister, Dr Mahathir said no date has been fixed for him to step down.

The Prime Minister said although the Sabah Chief Minister's post was for a two-year period, the government has not specified when Osu's term would end.

"We have not said exactly when," he added.

Asked about Osu's successor, he said the process would take some time.

Osu, 52, was sworn in as the Chief Minister of Sabah on March 15, 1999, after the Barisan Nasional won 31 out of 48 seats in the state elections.

On news reports that the Employees Provident Fund (EPF) had underwritten Time dotCom Bhd's shares, which were not fully subscribed by the public, Dr Mahathir said he has not received any information on the matter until now.

"I think the EPF is smart, they are not stupid. If the EPF is stupid, we will not be able to have the biggest pension fund in the world....RM180 billion. If they (EPF) are stupid, we will not have this amount of money," Dr Mahathir said.

-- BERNAMA

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