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Mahathir-Opposition

OPPOSITION IMPEDES NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, March 19 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today criticised opposition parties which often blocked national development just to gain popularity.

He said the opposition rejected development and would instead stand in the way of any goodness that the government desired to bring about to the nation.

"And you can see how much the government has developed this country, all of which over the opposition of the opposition parties," he told reporters after a pre-council meeting with Barisan Nasional (BN) Members of Parliament here.

At the meeting, the prime minister directed all BN MPs to scrutinise current issues given prominence, including those raised by opposition parties, and to have good grasp of the government's stand and the rationale.

Dr Mahathir, who was approached at Parliament House lobby, said he was convinced that the opposition would again be obstacles to development plans which the Dewan Rakyat would dwell on during its current sitting.

He anticipated that issues relating to the relocation of the Damansara national type Chinese school, clashes between rival resident groups in settlements off Jalan Klang Lama, investment in the national flag-carrier MAS, and low Tabung Haji and EPF dividends would be raised this time around.

Dr Mahathir said while Parliament would deliberate on two key plans this year namely the draft for the third long-term plan and the Eighth Malaysia Plan, he was certain that the opposition would also turn trivial matters into major issues.

By being obstacles to development in the past, the opposition had contributed to escalating costs of projects which had to be deferred, he said.

"Looking at the whole of Malaysia, if we were to follow the opposition parties, there is not a single thing that we can carry out.

"Had we followed the opposition's logic, there would be no Muda irrigation project, no irrigation scheme in Kelantan, no Penang Bridge, no north-south expressway, nothing at all.

"We're not supposed to make Proton cars, to make anything, nothing is good," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the opposition once objected to the Muda irrigation scheme claiming that even the soil would need to rest for six months.

He said the opposition claimed that it was not reasonable to have padi double cropping purportedly because "some people could not work throughout the year and would not have time to even keep their sarongs dry".

"Now that it has dawned upon them that the Muda irrigation scheme is beneficial, opposition supporters vent their anger at the government when they do not get irrigation water and cannot have double-cropping whereas they were the ones against it at the outset," he said.

Dr Mahathir said acceding to opposition demands would only spell destruction to the country.

He said the government was prepared to reply during question time to matters relating to the Jalan Klang Lama clashes and explain to the people what actually happened.

The government regarded national stability as of uppermost concern when

they were elements out to undermine it, he said.

"They are so fascinated by instability in other countries, hoping for such situation to also occur in the country and when it does, this government could be toppled.

"They look at several countries where rioting and street demonstrations lead to unseating of the government," he said.

Dr Mahathir said these elements seized upon the opportunity to exploit the Jalan Klang Lama clashes to gain popularity, especially among the poor.

"The poor, already feeling they are the oppressed lot, are easily and readily inflamed by people comparing them with Malaysia's abundant wealth while pointing to the Petronas Twin Towers whereas they remain poverty-stricken. These are issues that easily inflame people.

"Once inflamed such people will act violently and irresponsibly and the poor people themselves will be the victims," he said.

The prime minister said while six people died and scores others were injured in the Jalan Klang Lama clashes, their instigators did not suffer any problem.

"They just wait, hoping to reap the spoils of a fallen government brought down by street riots according to what they have planned," he said.

The government was looking at both urban and rural poverty in an effort to alleviate the problem, Dr Mahathir said while differentiating urban from rural poverty.

The urban poor, although earning quite high income and own cars as well as household appliances are still regarded poor when living in slums, he said.

On the other hand, the rural poor are not squatters and make it a lot easier for the government to extend them assistance, he said.

"So we cannot generalise everyone, there are some who are really poor, jobless, homeless and have no place.

"But for the other slum-dwellers, even if we provide them houses, they are not keen to move out to government-built homes to avoid paying rentals.

"They need not have to pay rent if they live in squatter settlements. There are cases of slum-dwellers owning proper homes elsewhere but have them rented out," he said.

Dr Mahathir added that the government would have to ensure that the genuinely poor receive assistance.

-- BERNAMA
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