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`Pas abuses freedom of speech with its ceramah'

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said Pas was abusing the freedom of speech allowed by continuously holding campaign activities that focused on instilling hatred towards the Government.

He said in other democratic nations, political parties stopped their campaign activities once the elections were over.

"But here in Malaysia, we find Pas campaigning continuously. If they just campaign, it's okay, but they agitate the people in their ceramah," he told reporters at the presentation of the Finance Ministry's excellent service awards here.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Finance Minister, said as listed in the party's organ, Harakah, ceramah were being held at hundreds of locations daily in the country.

"If you do it properly and legally, it's okay, but we find them holding ceramah anywhere and everywhere."

Police last month announced an indefinite ban on open air ceramah by political parties on the grounds of national security.

Pas, however, has openly said it would continue to hold them.

Dr Mahathir said in their ceramah, Pas focused on instilling hatred among the people by saying, among others, that the Government was not Islamic enough.

He said the party would get the people so worked up that they were not able to concentrate on their work or studies.

"In the mosques, universities, workplace...even the kindergartens are not spared from their politicking."

He said for instance, it would be quite impossible to separate education and politics if parties like Pas continued to misuse educational institutions for their own propaganda.

"They are not helping to build the nation. Instead they instill hatred so that they can get the support of the people."

The Prime Minister said although freedom of speech was allowed, limits had to be imposed so peace and stability were not compromised.

He said Pas was being defiant of the ban on illegal ceramah because the party wanted to put the Government in a bad light.

"They want to get arrested so they can accuse the Government of not being democratic."

In Seremban, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Dr Rais Yatim said police could use two laws to act against organisers and members of unlawful assemblies or gatherings, Hamidah Atan reports.

They are Section 141 and Section 142 of the Penal Code and Section 27 of the Police Act.

The offence under the Police Act is punishable with at least one year jail and a fine of between RM2,000 and RM10,000.

Under Section 141 and Section 142 of the Penal Code, offenders are liable to a jail term which may extend to six months, or a fine or both.

Rais said Pas' desire to defy police order was dangerous as it was inviting the public to participate in what was deemed an illegal activity that could threaten peace and security.

"The whole framework of the legal position will be put on a questionable platform if no action is taken against those who flout the law.

"We are concerned about this and the police must not flinch in their

duty even though they are outnumbered in some cases."

Rais, who is also Jelebu Umno division chief, said this when met after attending the State Umno meeting chaired by its liaison chief Tan Sri Mohamad Isa Abdul Samad, who is also Menteri Besar, at Wisma Negri, today.

Pas deputy president Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang, who is also Terengganu Menteri Besar, was quoted recently as saying Pas was prepared to face legal action.

Yesterday, Pas Kuala Kedah Member of Parliament Mohamad Sabu was charged in the magistrate's court in Kuala Klawang, Jelebu, along with six other Opposition members, with attending an illegal assembly last month.

The seven pleaded not guilty.

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