

15 MAR 2001

Mahathir-Meeting

UNDERSTANDING ON MALAY INTERESTS AMONG ALL MALAYS VITAL, SAYS PM

KUALA LIPIS, March 15 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that Umno has indicated its desire to meet PAS leaders to discuss the interests of the Malays as such a meeting is vital and will be of benefit to the Malays.

Dr Mahathir, who is Umno president, said that Umno would strive to make the meeting a reality as it felt that the interests of the Malays should be defended by all the Malays.

He said that Umno felt that the meeting was vital as there should be an understanding among the Malays since the interests of the Malays in the country had been challenged and the Malays were divided in dealing with such challenges.

"And the interests we mean are nothing more than what have already been enshrined in the constitution, which have been agreed to by all the races," he told reporters after a close-door meeting with committee members under the Lipis and Raub Umno divisions.

"We regard the meeting as vital and beneficial. It is not for Umno, not for PAS, not for any party but only for the Malays," he said.

Dr Mahathir has proposed that the meeting focuses on the special rights of the Malays, the position of Islam as the official religion and bahasa Melayu as the national language, and the status of the Malay Rulers.

He said that there should be a common stand on the matter as they affected the Malays generally.

Umno, he said, was not coaxing PAS in agreeing to the meeting but stating the importance of such a meeting, to benefit the Malays.

Asked whether the postponement of the meeting, scheduled previously to be held on Feb 19, showed that Umno was weak, he said that PAS should state its stand on whether it wanted the proposed meeting to materialise.

"We don't think we are weak. If PAS does not wish to meet, just say they don't wish to meet...don't give all sorts of excuses. If PAS feels that we do not care for the interests of the Malays, we (PAS) place more emphasis on national interests, just say so, it doesn't matter. That for this reason we (PAS) do not want to meet...it's all up (to them)," he said.

Asked whether the postponement of the meeting had provided mileage and publicity to PAS, he said it was up to the Malays to interpret it.

"If they wish to postpone, then we'll postpone it...we postpone it together. If we believe they gained publicity and mileage, that's the perception of the Malays, what can we do. We want to have it for the interest of the Malays including the Malays in PAS, the Malays in Keadilan, even the Malays in the DAP...their interest. If they were to say these are of no interest to them, it's OK," he said.

Dr Mahathir expressed regret that some people, having benefited from Umno's struggles in defending the rights of the Malays, were not prepared in defending these rights.

He said that if the Malays themselves did not want special treatment, like the entry of students in universities be based on merit and qualifications, this could be implemented but there should not be any complaints.

"If this is what the Malays want, we can do so and we can say that only those who are qualified can enter, those unqualified should not enter...there is no special treatment for Malay students entering universities. Nobody should complain," he said.

The prime minister said that the opposition actually wanted to emerge as the champion of the Chinese and even dared to make a statement that "if the Umno Malays want to kill the Chinese, kill the Alternative Malays first".

He said that such a statement was made to win the support of the Chinese as the opposition felt that the Malays supporting them would not run away and what was required was for them to win the support of the Chinese.

"That is why they support the Suqiu. They support the demands of the Chinese teachers. We have no intention of killing anyone...we are not anti Chinese, we are only asking for what are already enshrined in our constitution, not more than that," he said.

Dr Mahathir said such an action was also clearly to ensure that Umno was not popular among the Chinese and they would simultaneously gain the support of the Chinese and the Malays obsessed with their schemes, to win the elections.

-- BERNAMA

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