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We are more liberal, says Dr M

reports on "Dewan Rakyat" by Ramlan Said, Patrick Sennyah; Aionn Mohd DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Malaysians should be proud of the fact that Malaysia was more liberal than many other nations.

The Prime Minister said even in the United States, with its multi-racial character, only English was taught in schools unlike Malaysia where languages other than Bahasa Malaysia were also taught.

In Malaysia, he said the Government allowed the setting up of vernacular schools with assistance given to temples and churches.

"We are more liberal than many other countries in the world. We can be proud of this," he said when replying to a supplementary question from Dr Tan Seng Giaw (DAP-Kepong) on measures needed for the creation of a Malaysian race.

Dr Tan also questioned the wisdom of Dr Mahathir's efforts towards Malay unity which he claimed were contrary to the Prime Minister's Vision 2020 concept and the Malaysia Boleh spirit.

Dr Mahathir said the best theoretical way to create a Malaysian race was to turn non-Malays into Malays but the Government had no intention of doing this.

"We are more liberal ... we do not want to change their religions, names and languages but in matters of national interest, all must unite as Malaysians.

"For example, in our fight against currency traders, all Malaysians stood united behind the Government, did not create problems, did not take to the streets to topple the Government but instead gave their fullest support ... that's why we succeeded."

Dr Mahathir said it was good for the various races to be united and when issues involved the country, all should unite as one.

"So, there is no problem if the Malays are united as this is related to defending their rights under the Constitution. They are not asking for more, like wanting the Chinese to embrace Islam, become Malays and so on.

"We are not touching on the rights of others. Although Islam is the official religion, we realise there is freedom to embrace other religions. Bahasa Malaysia, which is based on Bahasa Melayu, is the national language but other languages are allowed to be used in schools and in daily life."

To a question from Datuk Ruhanie Ahmad (BN-Parit Sulong) on conditions imposed by Pas for unity talks, Dr Mahathir said although they were not related to Malay unity, Umno was willing to discuss any matter.

On Nasharuddin Mat Isa's (Pas-Yan) contention that Umno initiated the talks due to declining support from the Malays, Dr Mahathir said this was not true as Umno won 72 seats compared to Pas' 27 in the 1999 general election.

"Pas was able to get more seats than before not because of its ability or contributions to developing the country but more because of the 'black eye' (the assault against Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim by the former Inspector-General of Police) incident.

"They capitalised on it and made it as if I was responsible, that I assaulted that person. If this is how a party that wishes to govern conducts itself, I fear what's going to befall the country."

On hudud law (Islamic criminal law), Dr Mahathir said the Government had never said that it could not be implemented.

"We are saying that it should be implemented according to our ability. If we are staying in a country where the majority of the people are non-

Muslims, introducing hudud would lead to many problems, whereas Islam does not advocate its followers to do something that will create problems.

"In this country, many Islamic legislations have been introduced but Pas is harping on hudud to create problems for the Government and to fish for support."

Dr Mahathir said although the party now ruled Kelantan and Terengganu, it was not able to introduce hudud in both States.

He was confident that the Barisan Nasional would recapture both States in 2004 as the people realised now that Pas was only good in dividing the Muslims.

Replying to Datuk Mohamad Aziz (BN-Sri Gading) on steps to correct the wrongs committed by Pas, Dr Mahathir said as a country practising democracy, action according to the law would be taken against those committing offences.

However, he said such laws would not be used inconsiderately.

"We will give them the chance to correct themselves like stopping the labelling of others as kafir (infidel).

"But they said the decree (on labelling Umno members as infidels) could not be retracted as it was the opinion of an ulama. If this is so, it shows how far they have deviated from the true teachings of Islam."

In reality, Dr Mahathir said these people were only making use of Islam to confuse and lead Muslims astray from the true path.

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