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Dr M: Pas has the right to exist, voice its views

Ramlan said

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - The Government does not intend to get rid of Pas and rumours to this effect was started by the party to instil hatred against the authorities, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said it was also not true that the United States, as part of its campaign against terrorism, had asked Malaysia to get rid of Pas.

"There has been no such request from the US. There is no reason to get rid of the party. Although some of its members, including (Kelantan Menteri Besar Datuk) Nik Aziz Nik Mat's son, Nik Adli, have been arrested for involvement in militant activities, I think their actions are not supported by the party."

He said Pas had the right to exist and voice its views as Malaysia was a democratic country.

He said this in an interview with Arabic language news channel, Al-Jazeera Television, in London, early this morning. (Excerpts of the interview on Pages 10 and 12.)

The Prime Minister, who was on a five-day working visit to Britain, was interviewed by presenter Ahmed Mansour for the weekly talk show North Frontiers, which was showed at prime time in Doha, Qatar.

The 90-minute programme, aired live in Arabic, carries interviews with leaders and influential people around the world, and was filmed at various locations.

Al-Jazeera became famous following its reports on war against terrorism.

Dr Mahathir was asked to comment on a wide range of subjects, ranging from the war against terrorism, the functions of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference to the 1997 financial crisis and the role of ulama in development.

Ahmed spent a considerable time on reports in the Western media about the Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim case and the purported wealth amassed by the Prime Minister's children.

Dr Mahathir described the reports as an attempt to "find fault to attack the Government".

"There are many reasons why they are doing this. In Anwar's case, they claimed the police and prosecutors have been bribed and are not trustworthy in carrying out their duties.

"This is a deliberate attempt to paint a bad picture of the Government and also a personal attack against me."

Dr Mahathir said the prosecution had discharged their duties well and had acted on facts.

"It is not a conspiracy as claimed by the Opposition."

On his successor, Dr Mahathir said it would be his deputy, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

"He is my deputy. If I resign, he will replace me."

The Prime Minister said he had yet to decide whether to contest in the 2004 general election.

On when the decision would be made, he said: "When the time comes. I have to get the views of other (parties)."

The Prime Minister expressed confidence that the Barisan Nasional would perform well in the next polls.

He was also asked whether the US had made specific demands to Malaysia on the war against terrorism and whether US President George W. Bush had

given him an ultimatum as was the case with Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf.

"No specific demands were made. Bush did not issue the same ultimatum although I was expecting it."

Following the Sept 11 attacks on the US, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia had stated its readiness to combat terrorism, adding that Bush had thanked Kuala Lumpur for its stand during a telephone conversation.

He said the Government rejected claims that Malaysia had been used as a launching pad for the attacks, adding that no one had been able to provide proof to substantiate such allegations.

On reports that the US was preparing to attack Iraq, Dr Mahathir said a change of any government should be for the benefit of its people and not foreign countries.

He said methods adopted by the US in its war against terrorism were flawed as they failed to address the root of the problem, which is Palestine-Israel issue.

"As long as this issue is not resolved, they will not be able to eradicate terrorism."

ramlans@nstp.com.my

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