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Mahathir-ISA

M'SIA WILL RETAIN ISA, SAYS DR M

By: Salbiah Said

BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN, Oct 12 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today Malaysia will retain the Internal Security Act (ISA) which serves to protect against efforts to destabilise the country.

"As far as we are concerned, we will retain the ISA, and we are not ashamed of it," said Dr Mahathir in response to a question at a dialogue and lunch with the Malaysian community in Brunei at the International Convention Centre in Berakas here.

Dr Mahathir, who is on a two-day working visit here, said: "The ISA is there because there are some people who like to play on racial sentiments and destabilise the country.

"We find militant groups like the Al-Ma'unah planning to bomb places. We have to detain them as they might do a lot of damage."

In response to criticisms on Malaysia's judiciary system, Dr Mahathir said: "The West wanted everything to be done according to their instructions. And if they don't get the result of the decision of the court that suits their ideas, then that court is bad."

Citing Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's case, Dr Mahathir said the government could have detained him under the ISA if it wanted to. "If you detain anyone under the ISA, people will complain that he does not get the due process of the law."

Anwar, he stressed, was tried in a court of law and "there had not been a trial that long involving nine defence lawyers. The best of brains were defending him."

"It took a long time...everything was heard and even things that were irrelevant was dragged into the court. The court made a decision and found him guilty...and immediately the court was said to be manipulated by the government," he said.

He said as the court had not decided in their (West) favour, "therefore it was not good. We cannot go by that criteria. The courts are independent."

On criticisms that the government used the ISA to detain opposition leaders and not those from the ruling party, he asked: "How many members of the ruling party had been sentenced by the court in the past. To name a few, Datuk Harun Idris, Datuk Mokhtar Hashim and several other Chief Ministers were tried in court and found guilty."

"It is for the court to decide. The West seems to think if somebody is not guilty, the court must find him not guilty. They don't have the facts. We have the facts put up before the judge. The judge made the decision.

"Even in the second case (Anwar's), it was a full trial with so many defence lawyers and so many gymnastics by Datuk Seri Anwar. Due process was followed conscientiously."

"I am not worried what the West think. They don't like us.. they call us nasty things. They even said I am the first elected dictator in the world. That means I am elected again and again," he said.

On charges that the ISA was unfair, he said, what the United States was doing now was also to detain suspects without using any law.

"Many have disappeared and their families do not know where they are. Because they are Muslims and they are suspects, they have been detained by the US. They (US) did not detain them under any law.

In Malaysia, the ISA is used to detain those who plan to disrupt peace and stability in the country, noting that the government does not detain

those who are politically opposed to the government.

Citing a recent CNN interview with him, Dr Mahathir said he was accused of detaining all his political opponents.

Opposition leaders like Lim Kit Siang and Karpal Singh, he said, are considered a minority as they are not able to win enough seats to form a government.

On a lighter vein, Dr Mahathir said his political opponents would be those within his own party (Umno)... "Datuk (Seri) Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Tan Sri Musa Hitam, Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar, Datuk (Dr) Rais Yatim and Datuk (Abdul) Kadir Sheikh Fadzir," drawing laughter from the audience.

"How can they (West) say I detain political opponents under the ISA?" he asked.

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