

21 OCT 2003

Rais-Mahathir

DR M WILL NOT RETRACT HIS REMARKS ON JEWS, SAYS DR RAIS

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 21 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will not retract his remarks on the role of Jews despite the criticism by US President George W. Bush, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Dr Rais Yatim said today.

"What Dr Mahathir said (about the Jews) is the truth. I don't think he will withdraw his remarks," he told reporters at Parliament lobby.

He was asked to comment on Bush's criticism on Dr Mahathir's speech about the Jews at the opening of the 10th Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) Summit in Putrajaya last week.

Dr Mahathir had said the Jews ruled the world by proxy and they asked others to fight and die for them.

Foreign wire agencies reported US Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice as telling reporters at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) Forum in Bangkok yesterday that Bush criticised the remarks, saying it could arouse hatred and must be condemned.

On reports that Bush pulled Dr Mahathir aside and told him that his controversial remarks about the Jews were "wrong and divisive", Dr Rais said Bush's action was rude and disrespectful and did not reflect his credibility as a president.

"I consider Bush's action rude as though he wants to determine what and how a person should speak and say something," he added.

Both Bush and Dr Mahathir are attending the APEC forum.

Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said all the ministers fully supported Dr Mahathir's remarks because what he had stated was the reality which nobody was brave to voice it all this while.

He said Dr Mahathir's speech was rational and balanced and was aimed at avoiding any conflicts.

"What needs to be understood is that Dr Mahathir's remarks do not mean there are problems between Muslims and Jews but about the rights of the Palestinians that have been taken away by the Israelis," he said.

Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting said it was the right of a country's leader to air his views on certain issues.

"No power can say Malaysia cannot voice out on what it feels to be right," he said.

Malaysians must stand firmly behind Dr Mahathir to defend the voice of the Malaysian leader against injustices, said Ong, who is also MCA President.

-- BERNAMA

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