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Abdullah-Harakah

HARAKAH'S APOLOGY MEANINGLESS, IT'S DONE ON PURPOSE -- ABDULLAH

KUALA LUMPUR, June 18 (Bernama) -- Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today the apology extended by Harakah, the official organ of PAS, over the publication of a cartoon on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was meaningless because it was done on purpose.

"The apology is meaningless if it is offered just to shield itself from the blame and from being charged (of defaming Dr Mahathir)," he said when commenting on Harakah's decision to withdraw the cartoon from its June 16-30 issue.

The paper also apologised to parties, who felt insulted and took offence over the publication of the cartoon, which it said was not done intentionally.

"After hurting the feelings of others...delighted at seeing Dr Mahathir being made fun of, and then apologise. What kind of apology is that?" he told reporters after launching a patriotic essay writing competition organised by the Alumni of Overseas Umno Club at the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC), here.

Abdullah, who is also Home Minister, said he was waiting for a full report on the matter before deciding on the next course of action against the paper.

He said those concerned could have prevented the cartoon from being published.

Seeing the cartoon, they would know that it would not be right to publish, he said.

He said PAS claimed itself of being an Islamic party and it certainly did not reflect the Islamic work values.

Harakah, in its latest June 16-30 issue, published a two-frame cartoon, one associating "khinzir" (a pig) with the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and the other associating "mahazir!" (Dr Mahathir) with public religious schools (SAR).

Many Barisan Nasional (BN) leaders took exception to the cartoon and urged the Home Ministry to revoke the publishing permit of the paper for insulting Dr Mahathir.

In PUTRAJAYA, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Abdul Hamid Zainal Abidin said Harakah had not only offended the feelings of Dr Mahathir but also Muslims in general.

"Any person who is sensible and of good character cannot accept such action," he told reporters after launching a book on national fatwa (religious rulings).

According to certain views, he said the publication of such cartoon was "haram" (forbidden) and sinful especially when directed at someone of Dr Mahathir's status.

"It is an insult to Dr Mahathir who is respected as an outstanding Islamic leader, not only locally but also internationally," he said.

On the apology extended by the paper, he said it could not get away with it that easily.

"This is not about a political story but an injury to another person's character," said Abdul Hamid.

-- BERNAMA

RIZ ABG