

28 JAN 2003

Mahathir-Umno

UMNO CAN LOSE BY DEFAULT BECAUSE OF BICKERING AMONG MEMBERS

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 28 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he is worried that bickering among Umno members would cause the party to lose support of the people by default and not because the opposition party is stronger.

Prime Minister said he did not think that PAS would become stronger should the war against Iraq by the United States take place.

"I don't think so. I think in Malaysia, people are very rational about Islam and people know what is the true teaching of Islam.

"So I'm not worried about that, what I'm worried about is perhaps the bickering within my own party and we would lose by default, not because the other side is stronger," he said during an interview in the Asian Wall Street Journal programme aired over CNBC TV, tonight.

To a question whether there was potential bickering in Umno, Dr Mahathir said potential was always there whenever there was an opportunity to lead the party.

"To get into a position that is very attractive, there will be some contestants," he said.

Asked whether there would be another Islamic state for Malaysia, Dr Mahathir said this country was already an Islamic state by virtue of Islam being its official religion and that all laws were in conformity with the perception of Islamic laws.

He said the Syariah law was already being implemented but it only applied to the Muslims.

To a question if the time was still right for the fixed exchange rate, Dr Mahathir, who is also Finance Minister, said there seemed to be no indication why there should not be fixed exchange rate.

"Unless, of course, something happens to the US currency which makes it no longer a benchmark for the currency of the world," he said.

Malaysia has pegged its ringgit at RM3.80 to one US dollar since September 1998, due to the region's financial crisis.

Dr Mahathir said the world had had a fixed exchange rate for a long time and during that period there was good growth for the whole world.

However, he said the world decided to go off with the gold standard to allow speculators to determine the rate of exchange, and since then, the world had faced many crises.

"So, I don't think that floating the exchange rate is a solution or even a good regime for the international financial sector," he added.

-- BERNAMA

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