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Mahathir-Extreme

MAHATHIR SAYS MALAYSIA NOT BECOMING EXTREME ISLAMIC NATION

PUTRAJAYA, April 27 (Bernama) -- Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad today disagreed with the view that Malaysia is on the verge of becoming an extreme Islamic state, saying the majority of Muslims in the country cannot be easily led by the nose by people who pretended to be Islamic.

The former Prime Minister said this was because Malay Muslims were a very rational lot who knew what Islam was all about.

"But there are some who are not knowledgeable about Islam who can be misled," he told reporters after receiving Singapore's Minister Mentor and former counterpart Lee Kuan Yew at the Perdana Leadership Foundation here.

Dr Mahathir made the remarks after being queried about the gist of his discussion with Lee who was the city state's Prime Minister from 1959 to 1990.

He said that, among others, Lee wanted to know whether Malaysia would be governed by Islamists and whether former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim would make a comeback.

"I think this is a concern for a lot of people outside, especially among European countries, that Malaysia is on the verge of becoming one of the extreme Islamic states and that the Islamists are going to overcome the rest," he said.

Dr Mahathir quickly pointed out that such a scenario was not going to happen to Malaysia.

The visit by Lee came a day after Malaysia and Singapore signed an agreement to end a land reclamation dispute amid signs of blossoming relations between the two neighbours who went through some rough patches in the past.

When asked about his view on current bilateral ties, Dr Mahathir's assessment was this: "Well, it looks very good."

He said Lee, who left the foundation without talking to the press, also asked about his assessment of the past 18 months of the new Malaysian government.

Dr Mahathir said: "I explained to him that when I stepped down, I made a promise to myself that I will not interfere with the government, I will not pass any comments. So when he asked me to comment, I said I'm sorry, I just cannot answer that question," he said.

On whether Anwar would make a comeback, he said this might happen. "But I doubt whether he can make any headway."

On a more personal note, Dr Mahathir said he was glad to see that Lee was enjoying good health.

"He is his old self, interested in so many things," he said of the 81-year-old Lee, who, during his three decades in office, led Singapore from being a Third World country to become a financial and economic powerhouse.

The two men also exchanged ideas on writing memoirs. Lee's "The Singapore Story: The Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew" was published in 1998.

Dr Mahathir said: "He explained to me how he wrote his memoirs. I explained to him that I am very slow, I write long hand, and I get bothered by having to prepare speeches for the invitations I get.

"I am not very good at writing books. I write articles and speeches. I just cannot settle down to write long things."

-- BERNAMA

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