

Dr M: Suaram 'lackey of politicians and foreigners'
Malaysiakini.com
Disember 9, 2010

Those who raise issues of Dr Mahathir Mohamad's human rights record are lackeys or agents of foreign countries or certain politicians, the former prime minister said today.

Asked about Suaram's statement today that human rights abuses this year signalled Malaysia's return to the Mahathir era controls, the elder statesman initially refused to comment, saying that he respected the opinions of the human rights NGO.

However, the defence of Mahathir by Umno vice-president Shafie Apdal, who was also present at a press conference after the Maktab Rendah Sains Mara Ideapreneur Innovation Programme 2010 in Bukit Jalil today, prompted the elder statesman to respond further.

mahathir responses to suaram report 02Shafie in his defence of Mahathir said the latter's leadership had brought advances in education, the economy and infrastructure in the country.

"He was responsible for the advancement of the Malays and people should not be judgmental on allegations of human rights violations," the Rural Development Minister said.

Mahathir chipped in, asking the critics who questioned his human rights record, also questioned what went on outside Malaysia.

"If you are concerned about human rights, you should not be concerned about human rights in this country alone.

"You see we are helping the people of Gaza... who are being killed. That is blatant human rights violation. Do these people say anything about that?" he asked.

Yet, he said, Suaram talked about politics in Malaysia and made accusations against people who were against it.

Mahathir then said he had initially avoided comment as the issue was being politicised, and went on to accuse Suaram of making allegations "as if being a lackey of politicians or a (foreign) country".

The former premier, who led the government for 22 years, added that he could also claim the right to accuse his critics.

"I have the right to say that they are just lackeys of some other countries or some politicians.

"That is my right to say, that these people are breaching human rights," Mahathir said.

No banning of certain words

Asked what he thought of Chua Soi Lek's suggested ban on words that were sensitive to non-Malays, such as 'ketuanan Melayu', Mahathir said he did not agree with the suggestion.

"If you ban certain words, people will start asking (questions) and there will be complaints," he said.

The former premier said the issue of "ketuanan Melayu" had never cropped up before. PKR, in raising the issue, could be seen as a "traitor".

Last week PKR president Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail had, during her speech at the party convention, called for "ketuanan Melayu" to be discarded in favour of a more dignified "ketuanan rakyat".

Her speech sent Malay rights group Perkasa and Umno allies into a frenzy.

Asked about the comment of Sultan Azlan Shah of Perak on the matter on Tuesday that those who questioned the concept of ketuanan Melayu were "traitors", Mahathir said, "It is his highness' right to say it, and I agree with him."

He also voiced support for the controversial concept, saying that as long as Malays continued to remain "coolies" in the country, then their position should be improved further.

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Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/150422>