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① Mahathir Mohamed

Q: DATUK, THE FINANCE MINISTER HAS HINTED THAT THE GOVERNMENT MIGHT REDUCE EXPENDITURE FURTHER. AS WE ARE ONLY A FEW MONTHS MORE TO THE BUDGET, IS THERE ANY LIKELIHOOD OF THIS HAPPENING IN THE LIGHT OF THE CURRENT ECONOMIC SITUATION AND THE SLOW RECOVERY OF THE WORLD ECONOMY?

A: WELL, IF THE FINANCE MINISTER HAS SAID SO THEN HE MUST HAVE GOOD REASONS TO SUPPOSE THAT THERE MIGHT BE A FURTHER CUT IN THE BUDGET. AS I EXPLAINED EARLIER, OUR EXPENDITURE HAS RISEN VERY RAPIDLY. THERE IS NOW A NEED TO RATIONALIZE THE EXPENDITURE IN TERMS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S OR THE PUBLIC SECTOR'S INVOLVEMENT. BUT FOR THE NATION AS A WHOLE, WE WILL PROBABLY SPEND THE SAME AMOUNT OF MONEY. IT'S A MATTER OF TRANSFERRING THE GOVERNMENT'S BURDEN TO THE PRIVATE SECTOR.

Q: IN THE LIGHT OF THE CONTINUING FINANCIAL DIFFICULTY, DON'T YOU THINK THAT PERHAPS WE SHOULD GO FOR A CHEAPER TYPE OF DEVELOPMENT? IT SEEMS THAT WE ARE SO USED TO PUTTING UP IMPRESSIVE BUILDINGS USING CONCRETE. DON'T YOU THINK THAT WE SHOULD NOW ADOPT LESS EXPENSIVE BUILDING METHODS?

A: THIS IS AN OLD QUESTION -- THAT WE SHOULD GO BACK TO TIMBER HOUSES. TIMBER HOUSES, ESPECIALLY NOW, COST VERY LITTLE, LESS THAN CONCRETE HOUSES. HOWEVER, THEY REQUIRE MORE SKILLED WORKERS AND ARE NOT EASY TO BUILD. - MORE 0820/BW

MAHATHIR - INTERVIEW (ECONOMICS) 2 KUALA LUMPUR

WE HAVE NOW DEVELOPED CERTAIN CAPABILITIES IN TERMS OF PREFABRICATED CONCRETE HOUSING. MAYBE IT'S CHEAPER. WHAT WE ARE TRYING NOW IS TO REFINE CONSTRUCTION METHODS WHICH ARE CHEAPER THAN THE PRESENT TECHNIQUES. IT IS POSSIBLE FOR US TO DO THIS. YOU MAY KNOW THAT IN JOHOR AND KEDAH, THE CONTRACTS TO BUILD SCHOOLS, ABOUT 40 TO 50 IN EACH STATE, HAVE BEEN GIVEN TO A COMPANY WHICH SPECIALIZES IN PREFABRICATION. THIS WAY THE COST CAN BE REDUCED BECAUSE PREFABRICATION AND MASS PRODUCTION ARE DESIGNED TO REDUCE COSTS. AND THE BUILDINGS WILL BE MUCH MORE DURABLE, PROBABLY MUCH MORE COMFORTABLE. WE ARE STILL SEARCHING FOR NEWER CONSTRUCTION METHODS TO REDUCE COSTS. IN CERTAIN CASES, OF COURSE, IF WE FIND THAT THE PROJECT IS NOT NECESSARY, WE WILL JUST DO AWAY WITH IT. WHERE WE CAN REDUCE COSTS, WE WILL REDUCE; WHERE WE CAN POSTPONE, WE WILL POSTPONE; WHERE WE CAN SLOW DOWN, WE WILL SLOW DOWN. THAT'S THE WAY WE TACKLE THIS PROBLEM. - BERNAMA 0827/BW