

Issue of MB's marriage to Sultan's daughter

I will resolve it, says Dr Mahathir

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and Ho Kay Tat

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. -The Prime Minister said he will resolve "in the best way possible" the problem that had arisen from the Selangor Menteri Besar's secret marriage to the daughter of the Sultan.

It was his responsibility to find a solution, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said at the Subang international airport on his return from the summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in Belgrade.

The Sultan made public yesterday his annoyance with Tan Sri Muhammad Haji Muhammad Taib for marrying Tengku Puteri Zahariah without his consent.

He said his relationship with Tan Sri Muhammad was irreconcilable ("like shattered glass") but said he would abide by any decision considered proper by the Prime Minister.

Dr Mahathir, responding to questions at a Press conference, said he would have to study the problem before making his decision. He was aware that the Menteri Besar was on leave (for a month).

Pressed further by newsmen on whether he had any solution in mind, Dr Mahathir said he needed some time to think about it.

On Tan Sri Muhammad's position as Menteri Besar, he said: "I would have to study it fully."

He was aware of the problem before he left for Belgrade as he had an audience with the Sultan on Aug 29. "The Sultan normally informs me about whatever is happening which he feels I should know," the Prime Minister said.

Dr Mahathir also said that Tan Sri Muhammad had met him but declined to say when and where.

Asked what he thought of Tan Sri

Muhammad's secret marriage to the Sultan's daughter, Dr Mahathir said: "I cannot possibly make any comment."

On the NAM summit, Dr Mahathir said it gave Malaysia an opportunity to express its views on a number of international issues.

He said Malaysia's call to developed countries to write off the debts of poor nations was not made out of self-interest.

Malaysia, he added, was making the request on behalf of those countries which could not service their debts.

"Even though we feel that these debts should be written off, we are not asking it for ourselves," he said.

"We are capable of repaying our loans. Although we may ask for concessions, we are nonetheless capable of repayments and will continue to service our debts."

Dr Mahathir said there were some developing and least developed countries which could not afford to repay the loans, noting that the only real solution to the crisis was to write off the debts.

"If they cannot afford to repay, they will not be given new loans for development. And they will become bankrupt nations forever," he said.

"This should not happen to any country. It may happen to an individual but a country's life does not expire like a person's. A country will live on forever. But if it is saddled with debts, the country cannot develop."

Dr Mahathir also said the formation of the Group of 16 within NAM, of which Malaysia is a member, would not create an elite group within the movement.

"We obviously must have a small group working on a practical stand that can be adopted by NAM. We cannot have 100 representatives sitting around a table trying to work out solutions," he explained.

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"The number has to be reduced. This does not mean that the others do not qualify (to join). That is why we have representatives from various regions and also those whom we think are able to contribute."

The Group of 16 was proposed by Yugoslavia to enhance economic co-operation among South countries.

On the superpower reaction to the NAM's resolution, Dr Mahathir said their reaction was as expected.

"They do not concern themselves with its views and do not give coverage to the views of NAM's leaders. They are only interested in bringing down the image of certain leaders like Gadaffi (Libya's leader Colonel Muammar Gadaffi)," he said.

Asked how NAM could implement its resolutions

if the superpowers and developed nations do not heed its views, he said South Commission chairman Julius Nyerere had stressed during the summit that nations from the South should strengthen their co-operation.

"He also stressed that problems faced by the South could only be resolved by them. To depend on others will only bring disappointment," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said he visited the island of Crete (off Greece), en route home.

He was impressed with the tourist industry there and had come back with ideas on how to develop Malaysia's islands into booming tourist resorts.

Dr Mahathir noted that Crete, which once produced agricultural products such as olive oil and bananas, had succeeded in attracting an estimated 2.5 million tourists a year.

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