

PM: We can't allocate for all contingencies

NST - 9 JUN 1997

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — The Government could not make allocations for all contingencies, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said, citing yesterday's flash floods as an example.

The fact that the floods subsided quickly showed that the drainage system worked but it could not cope with the situation then, the Prime Minister said.

He said the city is located in a valley, and it was not uncommon to have floods. He said this could be overcome if the rivers are widened. But for this, the Government needs to acquire land, he added.

Dr Mahathir said: "We may have to relocate squatters to acquire land to widen the rivers ... but when we try to do this, the newspaper people will then show the people how uncaring the Government is.

"We care ... but there are costs for such actions."

The Prime Minister was asked to comment on yesterday's flash floods. Earlier, he had opened the G15 Experts Group Meeting on Exchange of Information on National Economic Policies.

Dr Mahathir said the Government would provide the necessary allocation to City Hall if it had the money. But in Malaysia, the Government needs to raise taxes to have more funds.

But the people generally did not like to pay taxes. "If the people are prepared to pay their taxes ... pay more taxes ... we can have more money," he said, adding that the Government has not wasted the people's money.

The Prime Minister said: "We don't make monuments in this country. We build roads, bridges and public facilities."

Asked if the recurrence of the floods would affect daily life in the city, the Prime Minister said: "That's not all. We also have traffic problems which have not been solved yet.

"For instance, if we want to build tracks for the Light Rail Transit system, to resolve the squatters problem alone take years.

"At times, when we have already paid them compensation, they do not want to move out. Such is the caring sentiments in this country that if squatters do something wrong, we can't act.

"We don't get the public's support on a firm action that we need to take."

Dr Mahathir also cited another instance where funds were required to help develop the country.

"When we want to build roads and impose a small toll, people demonstrate ... but when there are floods, they want allocation and ask why it is not given."