

▼25/02/20-54MST

CNS9043

U GE 25-02 00227 EG043

aae tbe

Mahathir-British

MALAYSIA LEARNT ABOUT ECONOMIC SANCTIONS FROM THE WEST, SAYS MAHATHIR

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KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 25 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight Malaysia's decision to exclude British companies from government contracts was a form of economic arm-twisting which "we learnt from Western countries".

He said if the West could threaten to withdraw the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) purportedly because Malaysia did not respect human rights and the environment, Malaysia also could do likewise.

He said it was unfortunate that the government's action would also affect several "genuine" British companies but then "we cannot take action against them one by one", but he believed that there were companies which had hurled slander at Malaysian leaders, particularly against him.

Dr Mahathir said this to reporters when commenting on the government's decision not to award contracts to British companies as announced by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim earlier in the day.

"If we give contracts to British companies, we'll be accused of all kinds of things," he said, adding that the government would not seek an apology or lodge a protest over the attitude of the British media which he felt had played a major role in slandering the government of Malaysia. --

more

ZV MGN

▼25/02/22-05MST

CNS9044

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aae tbe

Mahathir-British 2 Kuala Lumpur

He said the government's decision would not affect relations between Kuala Lumpur and London as the government did not have problems with the British government.

"We are only responding to the action of the British media. Apparently their media still has the colonial thinking and believes that non-Whites can be easily bribed and can be bribed at anytime, even for a sum of US\$50,000," Dr Mahathir said.

Asked until when the Malaysian government would adopt this stand, he said "we'll continue with this until the British media changes its attitude".

He said only contracts which had not been signed or were in the process of being signed would be affected by the government's decision while those which had already been signed would be honoured.

"Probably, in view of this decision, the Kuala Lumpur International Airport project will be affected a little but, never mind, others can carry it out," he said. An Anglo-Japanese consortium is involved in the airport project. -- more

ZV AAM MGN

▼25/02/22-09MST

CNS9045

U GE 25-02 00191 EG045

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Mahathir-British 3 Kuala Lumpur

Dr Mahathir said the British High Commissioner met him this evening to persuade the government to review its decision but he felt that Duncan Slater's move came too late as the decision had already been made and announced.

He said Slater regretted the latest development.

Asked whether Malaysia was prepared for retaliatory action from the British media, Dr Mahathir said "we'll wait and see further developments".

Dr Mahathir said he felt that the government's action was a lesson to the free press of the West which, in the end, could be abused to the detriment of the nation.

He said the Malaysian government supported press freedom but such freedom should go along with responsibility. He said that in Malaysia the press was very responsible.

The prime minister said that initially the government tolerated the attitude of the British media even in their attempt to topple the government of Prime Minister John Major but when it tried to involve Malaysia's interests, effective action had to be taken. -- more

ZV AAM MGN

▼25/02/22-32MST

CNS9046

U GE 25-02 00114 EG046

aae tbe

Mahathir-British 4 (last) Kuala Lumpur

"Initially we were patient, they tried to involve us with Pergau, MOU, BMF and others, more so with allegations of corruption to the extent we cannot accept it anymore," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he felt that among the media involved in hurling such slander was that owned by Rupert Murdoch.

He said he wanted the British media to report only the truth and not twist their reports with nonsense.

"This (reporting the truth), they cannot do because they do not understand what is meant by the truth," he said. -- Bernama

ZV AAM MGN

▼25/02/22-40MST

CNS9055

U GE 25-02 00142 EC833

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Mahathir-British 5 Kuala Lumpur (reopens) . . .

Meanwhile Umno Vice President Tan Sri Haji Muhammad Haji Muhammad Taib said the Malaysian Government had made a brave decision to protect the country's image from the unfounded allegation by the British media that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had committed an act of corruption.

Muhammad, who is Selangor Menteri Besar, said the British media action seemed to indicate that they wanted to colonise the developing countries by questioning the integrity of leaders such as Dr Mahathir.

He regretted the British media action in spreading false news and making unfounded allegations against the leaders of developing countries.

He said the irresponsible British media had stooped too low from the traditional level of the civilised media. -- Bernama

MNY AAM