

Government will not abandon its respo

5 AUG 1995

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By S. Jayakrishnan

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the Government would not abandon its responsibilities and would protect the people's interests by ensuring that basic necessities were within their reach.

He said the Government was responsible to the people and would not allow any quarters to focus merely on their own interests.

Dr Mahathir said this was the reason why the Government controlled bus fares, and the prices of vehicles and essential goods even though this was a matter for the private sector.

"I think at this stage the people should understand that the Government will not abandon its responsibilities. We will protect the people's interests," he said when asked to comment on the corporatisation on Jan 1 of Universiti Malaya and concern among students about the hike in fees.

"Wait for the details (of the corporatisation). But students who can afford to pay, should pay. We subsidise sometimes each student up to RM20,000 a year when that student is perhaps from a rich family.

"And we find that many rich people have their children studying in local universities. It is not right for the Government to subsidise them."

Dr Mahathir was speaking to reporters after officiating at the lifting of the skybridge linking the Petronas Twin Towers at the Kuala Lumpur City Centre project site in Jalan Pinang here.

Also present were Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Abang Abu Bakar, Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Nazri Tan Sri Aziz, chairman of KLCC (Holdings) Sdn Bhd Tan Sri Azizan Zainul Abidin, deputy chairman T. Ananda Krishnan, director and chief executive officer Hamzah Bakar.

In easing the concern of students who fear they will not be able to afford any increase in fees when Universiti Malaya is corporatised, Dr Mahathir said:

"We will provide allocation either in the form of scholarships, financial aid or loans for deserving cases."

He said the Government would still be involved in the administration of the university despite corporatisation and that it might provide some subsidy.

However, he said a decision on this had not been made.

Dr Mahathir said it was to protect the interests of the people and that the Government did not allow traders to indiscriminately raise prices.

He added that this was why the Government had launched the "Inflasi Sifar" campaign which was aimed at checking the prices of essential goods and that it was not meant for the people to purchase luxury goods like Gucci shoes.

Dr Mahathir said it would be impossible to check inflation if the prices of goods continued to increase and the country imported such goods.

Asked to comment on the DAP's plan to submit a memorandum to the Chief Justice of the Federal Court over the party's dissatisfaction with the High Court decision to disqualify lawyer Wee Choo Keong as MP for Bukit Bintang, Dr Mahathir said it was its right.

"But we abide by the rule of law. If the law decides that way that is what we follow."

Dr Mahathir said the Barisan Nasional was also not satisfied with the decision of the Penang High Court which last Thursday set aside the BN candidate Rhina Bhar's election petition for a recount in the Jelutong constituency which was won by DAP's Karpal Singh.

The court ruled that

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Cabinet will study changes to ISA first

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Rhina had served a defective notice of the petition under Rule 15 to Karpal which rendered the petition a nullity.

"We are also not satisfied but we accept (the court's verdict)," said Dr Mahathir.

Asked about the amendments to the Internal Security Act, Dr Mahathir said they would be tabled in Parliament when the Government was ready and that the Cabinet would have to check it first.

Dr Mahathir was also asked several questions pertaining to the KLCC project. He said when the building was envisaged, the intention was not to build the tallest in the world.

Dr Mahathir said there was an international competition for the building's design and that since Petronas wanted to build a tall building, it was decided to add a few more metres and the building became the tallest in the world.

(The Petronas Twin Towers will remain the world's tallest buildings at least until 1997 when the 457-metre Chongqing Tower in Chongqing, China, is expected to be completed).

Dr Mahathir was also asked by a South Korean journalist if the construction of the Petronas Twin Towers meant that Malaysian companies were competing with South Korean firms.

Dr Mahathir added that this was not so as the country was still developing.

Asked about the problems plaguing the South Korean construction industry, he said the Koreans were quite capable of solving their problems.

He added that the South Korean construction conglomerate Samsung had progressed rapidly as in the past Malaysians had heard more of another South Korean conglomerate, Hyundai.

Dr Mahathir said Samsung, who now seemed to be involved in everything par-

ticularly microelectronics, was aggressive and this was typical of major South Korean companies.

Asked if he was satisfied with the safety records of high-rise building projects particularly the KLCC, Dr Mahathir said the KLCC building management took safety seriously.

However, he added that in projects of such magnitude and size it was difficult to ensure a perfect safety record.

Asked if he felt the recent collapse of a department store in South Korea had affected the reputation of South Korean construction companies, Dr Mahathir said the Government was aware of this but felt Korean quality was still very good.

He added that what had happened in South Korea had also happened in other countries and that sometimes there were people who were not so responsible.

To another question, Dr Mahathir said rumours of sinkholes at the KLCC site were not true.

He said the building should have been built further in front, but because of the nature of the soil the planners moved it back so that it was currently on very solid ground.

"So that kind of rumour will be spread, I hope not by the Press, because some people have got some interest."

Asked about plans for the proposed concert hall in the KLCC building in which he had taken a keen interest, Dr Mahathir said his main concern was that it should be of good quality particularly with regard to its acoustics and design.

Dr Mahathir said he was shown the initial design which was rejected as it was not good.

He said the concert hall should have an attractive design and a Malaysian character.

"Now they are preparing a new design which they have shown me. I think it is a very good design."