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Trade-Mahathir

PM SAYS SOUTH'S NON-TRADE ISSUES SHOULD BE JUDGED BY WORLD BODY

By: Rachman Nordin

ACCRA, Nov 12 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said an international body should be set up to judge developing countries on non-trade issues which he said should be kept out of next month's World Trade Organisation (WTO) ministerial meeting.

"We want to talk about trade and trade only and, of course, investment. And let's keep extraneous matters out of the Singapore WTO meeting," he told reporters here on Monday.

Dr Mahathir said if there was to be judgement on the record of developing countries on labour practices, environment protection, human rights and corruption, it should be done by an international body which must also judge the West as "they are also corrupt".

He was replying to questions at a farewell joint news conference with Ghanaian President Jerry Rawlings on whether Malaysia and Ghana shared a common stand on WTO's multilateral trade agreements.

Dr Mahathir made a four-day official visit to Ghana as part of a week-long tour to two west African states starting with Guinea.

The Prime Minister said there are attempts by the West to include labour practices and corruption in a country as conditions to be overcome before there is to be any investment by foreign investors.

He said: "The effect of this is, of course, to reduce foreign investment in a country."

He said Malaysia saw this as an attempt by the West to starve developing countries of investments by saying that these countries were corrupt, ill-treating their workers or not practising human rights.

Dr Mahathir said the West had no business to pass judgement on a developing country's record on such non-trade issues as they were subjective matters which could be discussed at other forums.

"If you think the labour practices of a country are not up to your expectations, then you can discuss this at the ILO (International Labour Organisation) and not at the WTO ministerial meeting in Singapore," he said.

Dr Mahathir cited a recent case of the West going to a developing country and corrupting the people and then publicised that the country was corrupt. He did not name the country.

"This is because they have control of information and we have no way of explaining ourselves," he said.

A senior Ghanaian official, prompted by Rawlings to complement Dr Mahathir's remarks on the issue, said Ghana had no disagreement with Malaysia on WTO's multilateral trade and investment agreements.

In fact, he said, Ghana was aware that the West was trying to "smuggle non-trade issues into the meeting's agenda".

At the news conference, Dr Mahathir and Rawlings also replied to questions on wide-ranging issues, notably notions among some Ghanaians that the growing presence of Malaysian investment in the country was a form of neo-colonialism.

A Ghanaian reporter who raised the question cited the majority stake acquisition of Ghana's key shipyard and dry dock at Tema near here by a diversified Malaysian business group.

While here, Dr Mahathir witnessed the formal handing over of the shipyard to Malaysia's Business Focus group. He also opened two banks, a television and cinema production joint-venture and the first exhibition of

Malaysian products in west Africa.

Dr Mahathir assured the Ghanaian media and Rawlings himself that the idea of Malaysian businessmen investing in Ghana was not to take over or just to make profit.

He said: "If our knowledge of business is of any use at all to the Ghanaians then we would invest in order to transfer the knowledge and bring in the capital without which a nation could not progress."

He said Malaysians too were no less nationalistic than everyone else but nationalism must be beneficial to a country rather than bringing mere pride of ownership.

Rawlings said he was fully convinced that Malaysian investors in his country have Ghana's interest utmost in their minds whatever the circumstances.

After leading each other's country at the Malaysia-Ghana bilateral talks on the final day of his visit, Dr Mahathir and Rawlings witnessed the signing of a government-to-government agreement on investment guarantee and other private sector memoranda of understanding.

The MOUs included a gold mining lease and purchase of a 40 per cent stake in Ghana's public-listed Commercial Bank by Malaysian investors. --

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