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Currency issue to be raised in HK

Kamarul Yunus

MALAYSIA will raise the issue of currency speculation, which has hit several Asean currencies, at the World Bank/International Monetary Fund meeting in Hong Kong, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the Prime Minister, who will be attending the meeting, also said he will continue to bring up the issue at international forums and seminars.

Dr Mahathir said this during his meeting with visiting Brunei Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah of Brunei in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Briefing reporters, Abdullah said Dr Mahathir stressed that manipulation is the cause of the currency problem facing South-East Asian countries.

Dr Mahathir also told Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah that he will seek the support and views of developing nations to stop the activity once and for all.

Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah responded by giving his assurance that Brunei will work with Malaysia and other developing countries, particularly Asean, to resolve the currency problem.

"He (Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah) understood the problem resulting from this (currency manipulation) and he feels that something has to be done," Abdullah said.

The minister said Dr Mahathir described those responsible for manipulating the currency as "committing a criminal activity".

"The Prime Minister gave his views and had sought the support of other developing nations, especially members of Asean, which were seemingly affected by the heavy speculative attacks on their respective currencies," he added.

Dr Mahathir said the currency problem created various difficulties to the developing countries, which the prime minister described as "not very rich countries and are still poor but working hard on developing their economies".

The Prime Minister also stressed the importance of Brunei and Malaysia not only to understand the currency problem but at the same time exchange views and information on such an issue.

"The Asean region should solve the problem together ... not only Malaysia and Brunei but also other countries," Abdullah said.

Abdullah said although Thailand's proposal for the setting up of the Asean Monetary Fund was not discussed during Dr Mahathir's meeting with Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, Asean had, during the Asean Ministerial Meeting (AMM) last month made a commitment to tackle the currency problem.

During the AMM, Abdullah said Malaysia has stated its stand that there should be a concerted Asean effort in tackling the currency problem in the region.

"The Asean foreign ministers had agreed that something has to be done at the Asean level to tackle the issue," he added.

The Brunei Sultan, who arrived Kuala Lumpur on Monday, is on a four-day official visit to Malaysia on the invitation of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Ja'afar. He last visited Malaysia in 1992.

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