

27/07/1997

Dr M: It's George Soros (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today confirmed that he was referring to George Soros when he spoke about "rogue speculators", describing the American financier as "thoughtless" and his activities as "criminal".

He said the poor must be protected from people like Soros as he was out to destroy their economies.

In Okayama last week, Dr Mahathir said an American financier, who was known to have strong views on the entry of Myanmar into Asean, was linked to the speculative activities of currencies in the region.

Opening the 30th Asean Ministerial Meeting on Thursday, Dr Mahathir branded those who were out to destroy Asean economies as "rogue speculators" and "anarchists".

He said there was a well-planned effort to undermine economies of the region by destabilising their currencies.

Asked today whether he was referring to Soros on both occasions, Dr Mahathir said: "Yes. Today, I am confirming that George Soros is the man whom I was talking about." (Profile on P4)

On whether he considered Soros a criminal, Dr Mahathir said: "Well, as much as people who produce and distribute drugs are criminals because they destroy nations, people who undermine the economies of poor countries (are too).

"If you want to devalue the pound or the US dollar, you can go ahead and do it. But if you do this against poor countries and you think you are doing a great job ... a charitable job, I think you must be somewhat distorted in your idea about things."

Dr Mahathir was speaking to media representatives after launching the Concept Request for Proposals for the Multimedia Super Corridor at Nikko Hotel.

The CRFPs are for local and foreign companies to propose the most innovative solutions for the seven MSC flagships - electronic government, multi-purpose card, Smart schools, telemedicine, borderless marketing, research and development clusters and worldwide manufacturing web.

Dr Mahathir's remarks came a day after Soros admitted that he wanted Malaysia and Thailand to disallow Myanmar from joining Asean but denied linking it to currency speculation in the region.

Asked to comment on Soros' denial, the Prime Minister said:

"It is very difficult to separate the left hand from the right hand. Sometimes you say you don't know what your other hand is doing. I think it is very difficult if you have a split personality ... unless he is schizophrenic or something like that."

Dr Mahathir expressed disappointment that while certain people championed human rights, the same people allowed those like Soros to undermine the economies of not just countries, but regions.

"We have worked 30 to 40 years to develop our countries to this level, but along comes a man with a few billion dollars, and who in a period of just two weeks, has undone most of the work we have done.

"And as a result, the people of our countries suffer. You talk about human rights and protecting people.

"But they must be protected from people like Soros who has so much money and so much power and totally thoughtless because he is not only hurting the people of Myanmar but the poor people in Indonesia, Malaysia, the

Philippines and Thailand.

"These people suffer because the cost of everything has gone up. If you want to buy imported goods, we have to pay more because the exchange value of our currency has gone down.

"And we have no choice but to buy things from outside. So, who is he (Soros) helping? I would like to know.

"People who, on their own, think they can put the world right, must be a little bit off their heads.

"We spent our time building up these nations, trying to give our people a good life and trying to increase their income.

"But this man, in a matter of a few days, destroyed everything that we have done."

Dr Mahathir said it was ironic that the world did not regard Soros as a criminal but considered others who were trying to help their own people as criminals.

Countries like Malaysia now had to pay more for machinery, raw materials and other needs, he added.

He said this was the same situation when the Group of Seven revalued the yen.

"We borrowed yen and when they revalued it, we had to find more Malaysian ringgit to pay our debt. In fact, we had to find two-and-a-half times more.

"If countries behave like that," he said, "poor countries will have no chance at all."

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