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Dr M: I did not say it was a Jew conspiracy

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CUKAI, Sat. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad clarified today he did not say that efforts to impede the economy of Malaysia and other Muslim countries are due to the conspiracy of the Jews as implied by some newspapers today.

"I did not say it was a Jewish conspiracy. I said it was by coincidence that this person (currency speculator George Soros, who had caused the Malaysian currency to decline) is a Jew and that by coincidence we are Muslims."

The Prime Minister said this when asked by reporters about the possibility that the reports of his speech on the Jews yesterday carried "some risks".

The newspaper reports, especially their headlines, had given the impression that Dr Mahathir had blamed the "Jew conspiracy" for the decline in the value of the ringgit and adversely affected the economy of some other countries. (The NST did not carry such a report.)

By reporting that such efforts were the conspiracy of the Jews, the Prime Minister said, the Press was only pitting him against the Jews (nak bagi saya berkelahi dengan Yahudi).

He was responding to questions at a Press conference after opening the Terengganu Advanced Technical Institute (Tati).

Dr Mahathir said the Jews "are a very strong race" and he could not and would not simply make such an accusation.

Also present were his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, Menteri Besar Tan Sri Wan Mokhtar Ahmad and State Executive Councillors.

Without mentioning Soros' name, the Prime Minister had spoken on Soros' involvement in causing the decline in the value of the ringgit and the fact that Soros was by coincidence a Jew when addressing a large crowd at the Sultan Mahmud airport in Kuala Terengganu yesterday.

Asked to comment on foreign news agencies reports about Australia's claim that its application for a contract to build 27 warships for the Royal Malaysian Navy were rejected because of its former Prime Minister Paul Keating's offending remarks on Dr Mahathir, the Prime Minister said he was sad over such a claim.

AFP reported yesterday that Australian Trade Minister Tim Fisher, who is also Deputy Prime Minister, stated he would raise the issue on Kuala Lumpur's rejection of the defence contract during his visit to Malaysia next week.

The Australian Government had earlier blamed the anti-Asian campaign by its MP Pauline Hanson and Keating over his offending remarks on Dr Mahathir for causing the Australian Government to lose the defence contract worth RM5.6 billion.

The report said although Australia had lobbied for it, Malaysia had selected a German company to build the warships.

"There is no reason for such a claim. Australia may be as good as Germany, but probably the contract was awarded to Germany based on other factors... if it was ever given to Germany."

Asked if the contract was actually awarded to a German firm, he said he had not been informed about the matter.

Asked to elaborate on the implementation of projects which he mentioned during his speech at the opening of Tati, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia had

been criticised for having so-called mega projects.

"It's okay if it is true. But what they (currency manipulators) had done had adversely affected our economy. Our so-called mega projects need not necessarily impede our economy, but the depreciation of our currency did.

"Why are they so concerned about our so-called mega projects? It's what they did on purpose which adversely affected our economy," he added.

Asked if the projects initiated and undertaken by the Government were not mega projects, he said they were not.

"But because of the depreciation of the ringgit, some of these projects could not be continued.

"Actually we can afford these projects. We are not being wasteful ... we are not building a statue for Dr Mahathir or for other leaders.

"But we have become weak because of the depreciation of the currency. And because of this, there are many things which we cannot implement, whereas in the past we could afford to build even Bakun (hydroelectric dam in Sarawak). Now we have become poor and cannot proceed."

On whether efforts to cut cost, including ministers not using imported cars, should continue even when the country's economy is good, Dr Mahathir said: "We should take pride in using our own products."

Asked on the possibility that his trips overseas might be interpreted as not helping to save cost, Dr Mahathir said: "I do not go overseas for makan angin (vacation).

"The reporters who follow me know this and say they cannot keep up with my pace. I work when I am supposed to rest."

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