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I don't want to meet Soros, says PM

Ashraf Abdullah

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today he will not meet United States financier George Soros, adding that the World Bank has no business arranging a meeting between the two.

"I will go to Hong Kong but I don't have any wish to meet him (Soros)," Dr Mahathir said when asked to comment on foreign Press reports that he might meet Soros during the World Bank-International Monetary Fund annual meeting in Hong Kong next month.

Yesterday, the Associated Press quoted World Bank spokesman Tim Cullen as saying that the bank would arrange for a meeting between Dr Mahathir and Soros, who has been blamed for the fall of the ringgit and other Southeast Asian currencies.

Cullen had said that the meeting would take place during a three-day meeting of the World Bank-IMF in Hong Kong beginning Sept 20.

Speaking to reporters after a four-hour visit to the National Sports Complex and Games Village in Bukit Jalil, Dr Mahathir also took to task the World Bank for trying to arrange such a meeting.

"I have never given the World Bank the mandate to arrange anything. I don't know what business is it of theirs. "Trying to make this kind of manipulative speculation legal, is it?"

Dr Mahathir is scheduled to deliver a keynote address entitled Asia as Opportunity on Sept 20, while Soros will participate in a forum on global integration on Sept 21.

The Prime Minister has accused Soros of attacking the currencies of Asean member countries to punish the group for accepting Myanmar into its fold.

Soros has dismissed these charges, saying that his activities were commercial and not political.

In an exclusive interview with the New Straits Times recently, Soros said he wanted to meet Dr Mahathir, an invitation that Dr Mahathir had earlier said he would consider.

The Prime Minister said Malaysia was not against speculation but against manipulation by the rich who made money out of countries which were just emerging and impoverished their people.

"You must remember that I am not talking about Malaysia alone. Other countries are also affected and their poor people are suffering even more."

He said all these countries spent 40 years trying to build up their economies and a person like Soros comes along with a lot of money (to undermine their economies).

Asked whether it would be fair for Soros to tell his side of the story, Dr Mahathir said: "He has only listened to me through the Press. So he can make his statements to the Press and I will listen.

"How can anybody say it's fair to undermine the economy of a country. If that is fair then I think it's better we don't develop at all.

"Why should we allow others to undermine (our economy), we can undermine it ourselves.

"We can become as corrupt as possible, take the money out of our own country and impoverish our people.

"I would rather Malaysians impoverish Malaysians than have these people who have so much money to make money out of poor people. I think the principle is all wrong.

"When you are rich you help the poor. But this, when you are rich, you steal from the poor and that is exactly what Soros has done ... stealing from the poor. Nothing can justify that. It is a crime."

Asked to elaborate on the agreement between Malaysia and China to promote power centres in Asia and Europe, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia did not want the world to be dominated by a single super power "which will oppress the world.

"We want competition among the powerful nations, so China agreed with us. We hope to be given the freedom to speak with whoever we like, now when we want to speak with Japan, with South Korea, we are not allowed.

"It can do what it likes but we can't. It even complains when I wear the Baju Melayu," he said.

Yesterday, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said Malaysia and China had agreed in principle to promote power centres in Asia and Europe for the development of a healthy international community.

This is because, at the moment so much attention had been given to the US.

This was reached during a private meeting between Dr Mahathir and his Chinese counterpart, Li Peng, yesterday.

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