

06 OCT 1997

Mahathir-Media

I'M NOT STEPPING DOWN, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 6 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that he is not stepping down as prime minister amid what he says is a definite attempt by the foreign media and fund managers to "get rid" of him.

"There is definitely an attempt by certain foreign media and fund managers to get rid of me," he told reporters on his return from a 12-day tour of Cuba and South America.

He was asked about foreign media reports suggesting that he steps down following Malaysia's currency and stock market turmoil.

About 1,000 supporters, mostly from Barisan Nasional component parties, gave Dr Mahathir a rousing welcome outside the Bunga Raya VIP lounge of the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah International Airport in Subang near here.

Some of them were seen carrying banners with words such as "Teruskan Perjuangan Mu" (Continue Your Struggle), "Kami Berdiri Teguh Di Belakangmu Mahathir" (We Stand United Behind You) and shouting "Hidup Mahathir" (Long Live Mahathir).

Dr Mahathir said the foreign media were being controlled by people with vested interest who had their own agenda.

He said they would not publish anything against their interest.

"Like my speeches for example, they publish parts which they want but because they fear others will be influenced, they don't publish...they don't even show me on TV," he said.

"This is how they manipulate they have an agenda of their own."

He said the rumours of his resignation was cooked up and he believed that the rumours would persist because this was the aim of the currency traders.

"They want to get rid of this chap who criticises them and make suggestions which are already beginning to be accepted by some people like the IMF and the World Bank," he said.

At the World Bank and International Monetary Fund meeting in Hong Kong before he embarked on his just-concluded tour, Dr Mahathir called for currency speculation to be outlawed and for currency trading to be confined only to the financing of trade.

He had described currency trading as "unnecessary, unproductive and totally immoral" because currency speculators were reaping huge profits by making developing countries like Malaysia poor.

He made the call amid the currency turmoil in the region which has since caused the Malaysian ringgit to plunge by about 30 per cent against the US dollar.

The prime minister said today that he first heard of his resignation in Argentina, the last leg of his four-nation tour which also took him to Uruguay, Chile and Cuba.

He said he denied that he would resign when he was questioned by the foreign press that he was supposed to make an announcement of his resignation on Oct 11.

He also said that there was a concerted effort to slow down the growth of the most dynamic region in the world.

"This is not only happening in Malaysia. It is not directed at Malaysia alone.

"But what has Indonesia done to them? What has the Philippines which is just coming up done to them?," he asked.

"As far as my resignation is concerned, the foreign media's attempt will be a futile effort," he said adding that he "will fight on" with the backing of all Malaysians.

Dr Mahathir said he was sure the foreign media would accuse him of instigating Malaysians to show their support to him in his fight against currency manipulators.

The Prime Minister said just like the people who had shown their support to him on his return here today, the local corporate figures, who had accompanied him in his visit to the Latin American countries had also pledged their support to him in tackling the currency and stock market problem.

Dr Mahathir called on Malaysians not to be taken in by the dirty tactics of the western media.

Asked on foreign reports that there were conflicting signals between Dr Mahathir and Anwar, he said there were attempts by the foreign media to strain his ties with Anwar, who was seated next to him during the news conference.

"Some say Anwar is limp, I am hard, I don't know how they know about this," he said to giggles from his audience.

"The fact is that either you are an independent country with a democratically elected leader who then decides for the country or you give up and let foreigners whose interest is mainly making money to determine who is the leader of this country, I mean you have a choice over that."

"If you want, okay, you can throw out this leader because this magazine says the leader is no good. That is the end of democracy. Forget about democracy, we just work on the basis of what the magazine says," he said.

"We should not be taken in by their argument, It is their number one aim to stop anybody, including myself from criticizing them."

"What I say, they don't like, they lower the value of the ringgit. But then if I don't say anything also the ringgit falls. Initially I didn't say anything. When it first happened did I say anything? I did not say anything, I was overseas. I never said anything on Soros but the ringgit went down."

"Singapore, Indonesia and the Phillipines did not say anything and why is that their currencies also went down," he asked.

--BERNAMA

ES ARA AAM