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Mahathir-Projects

MALAYSIA NOT BOWING TO OUTSIDE FORCES

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 5 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the announcement that the government is delaying big projects due to the present currency problem is not an indication that the government is bowing to outside forces especially foreign rogue speculators and economic analysts.

The Prime Minister said that the measure had to be taken because the costs of construction would be 20 per cent more in Ringgit terms following the decline in the value of the Ringgit and manipulation in the stock market especially by foreign fund managers.

"As they have succeeded in causing our currency to depreciate, the costs of the projects have become higher. Therefore we have no choice but to take this action," he told a news conference at the end of the first day of the Umno general assembly at the Putra World Trade Centre here.

Last night, after chairing the Umno Supreme Council meeting, Dr Mahathir announced the government's decision to delay several big projects like the Bakun hydro-electric dam project, the Kuala Lumpur Linear City project, the Northern Region International Airport project and the highway project to link the three highlands in the central main range of the peninsula.

However, the measure had been interpreted by foreign economic analysts as the government bowing to pressure exerted on the country's economy and an admission that the country's rapid growth along with the construction of big projects had resulted in the overheating of the country's economy.

At the news conference, the Prime Minister, in a cynical tone, congratulated them for "succeeding" in causing the depreciation of the Ringgit and the downtrend in the stock market.

He said: "So I wish them all the best because they can celebrate now."

"They are really happy that their actions have forced us to delay the projects...to force us (to delay them) is the reason for them to exert pressure so that our currency depreciates," he said.

In a serious mood later, Dr Mahathir said that the government would proceed with the projects when the economy has recovered.

The government, he said, had never faced problems in implementing projects until its faced this currency problem.

However, Dr Mahathir believed that the government's desire to proceed with the big projects when the economy had recovered sufficiently, would cause them to strive to ensure that it remained to decline as at present.

"I cannot say (when the Ringgit will recover). When we say we will overcome (the Ringgit's decline), some others will try to make us fail.

"There are forces outside. I do not know what wrong we have done but it looks like they really grudge us. If we were to read their reports, it seems they are happy that we are poor," he said.

Asked how he felt in facing such pressures, Dr Mahathir said he was sad and that he failed to see any reason why they were determined to ensure that the government terminates the big projects.

In jest, the Prime Minister said that Malaysia may in future have to construct buildings two metres lower than buildings in the developed countries.

"We shouldn't be building buildings that are taller than their buildings. That's not done by developing countries you know. The fact that we did and it hurts a lot of people...and of course, the financial

reporters are very very annoyed because we have the temerity to challenge the status of the developed countries by doing things which they have not done. We must remember that," he added.

-- BERNAMA

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