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PM: We'll act against speculative raid on ringgit

LANGKAWI, Wed. - The Cabinet today discussed the speculative attack on the ringgit and the forms of action to be taken by the Government to tackle the situation, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

"We discussed and we have some idea on how to do it... we will take action," said the Prime Minister, when asked by reporters at the Langkawi International Airport on whether the Cabinet discussed the matter.

Dr Mahathir was here to attend the concluding dialogue session of the third Langkawi International Dialogue.

But he declined to reveal the kind of action to be taken by the Government.

"I cannot tell you what kind of action... If I tell you what kind of action, then it will be countered... we will see what happens."

On whether the Government would take action against American financier George Soros who was held responsible for the speculative attack on the ringgit and currencies of Asean countries, Dr Mahathir said:

"What can we do? He is in America.

"We are not a superpower... if we are a superpower, we can send our troops to America and arrest him and bring him here to stand trial."

Asked how the Government could take action when the foreign exchange market was a free market, Dr Mahathir replied:

"Free for crooks? (A) free market is for people who do normal trading...market forces, we accept.

"But a person who deliberately comes in because he is rich and undermines the economy of a country - that is not freedom."

On US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's remarks in Singapore yesterday that Dr Mahathir's critical views of the West were not shared by the younger leaders of Asean, the Prime Minister said it was Albright's right to say that but he also had his rights.

On Albright's statement that Dr Mahathir chose a harsh way to express his views, Dr Mahathir, who was apparently referring to his criticisms of Soros, said it should not be viewed as harsh.

The Prime Minister said if she said that the accusation against Soros was not true, then how about the attack on the British currency which resulted in the loss of STG2 billion.

"The value of sterling went down and people said the loss was caused by Soros.

"Those who had invested RM100,000 with Soros and now have RM300 million ringgit, where did the money come from if not by robbing the poor?"

"We can do business but there is a limit to it.

"You can make 10 to 15 per cent profit but when you make hundreds of per cent of profit, that is robbery and I think that is illegal.

"You know as much as charging high interest rate is illegal, trying to profiteer is illegal, this is profiteering."

A Reuter report from Singapore quoted Albright as saying she felt she had struck a resonant chord among Asean Foreign Ministers during the Asean Regional Forum and Post Ministerial Meeting, adding that not all members of Mahathir's generation of leaders in their 70s shared his perspective.

She had said: "I think that Dr Mahathir is a case of his own.

"I think, frankly, that I articulated what some of them had been thinking and were more willing to admit than I had expected that the process in Burma had been slower than they would have liked," she told

reporters yesterday.

Albright was in Singapore for less than 24 hours after the Asean conferences.

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