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Pledge to thwart rogue speculators

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the Government would act to protect the country's economy from rogue currency speculators but did not go into details.

"We have got some idea of what to do, but obviously we cannot just publicise what we want to do as much as (American financier George) Soros does not publish what he wants to do," he said.

He was responding to questions by reporters after launching the Great Malaysian Air Rally at the Royal Malaysian Air Force air station in Sungai Besi.

The rally is held in conjunction with the Langkawi Oshkosh East Fly-In convention and exhibition from Aug 4 to 8.

Dr Mahathir also launched the Rakan Muda Experimental Aircraft which will take part in the air rally and the RMAF Museum website, the first such museum in the country to go on the Net.

Dr Mahathir said the currency issue was also discussed in his meeting with Asean's dialogue partners, who are here to attend the Asean Regional Forum and the Post Ministerial Conference, at his office earlier today.

They included United States' Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, China's Foreign Minister Qian Qichen and Australia's Foreign Minister Alexander Downer.

Foreign Ministers and representatives from India, Japan, Russia, Canada, the European Union, South Korea and New Zealand were also present.

"We had a very good discussion. It focused almost exclusively on the attack on currencies. I gave my views about this and they responded," said Dr Mahathir.

He said: "Some suggested that we should raise the matter with Apec (Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation) and others of course said that this is normal, while others gave a lot of views on how to tackle this problem.

"I think the EU (European Union) in particular is interested in a more stable currency exchange situation because it will facilitate trade.

"I think we all agree that this is a very violent situation (and) is not doing anybody any good," he said.

Asked if Soros was mentioned in the discussions, the Prime Minister said he believed everyone knew who he (Dr Mahathir) was talking about.

Dr Mahathir had on Saturday said he was referring to Soros when he spoke about "rogue speculators". He described Soros as "thoughtless" and his activities as criminal.

On the United States' State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns' comments that the currency crisis was the result of economic forces at work and should not be regarded as a criminal act by speculators, Dr Mahathir said:

"What I would say is that when (Michael) Milken and (Ivan) Boesky were doing the junk bonds business in the New York Stock Exchange, it was not regarded as criminal at first. But they were subsequently arrested and put in jail.

"So it depends on your perception. I had explained this. What we can do depends on our perception. If you perceive this as a criminal act, then you can act. But if you think that this is normal, of course you cannot act," he said.

Milken and Boesky, traders in the NYSE, were arrested and convicted after being found guilty of violating securities law and insider trading

in 1990 and the mid-1980s, respectively.

Asked if he would raise the issue with US President Bill Clinton at the Apec meeting in Vancouver later this year as suggested by some of Asean's dialogue partners, he said:

"I do not know. When we go to Vancouver we will see whether we can talk about this or not."

On Jelutong Member of Parliament Karpal Singh's call for the Prime Minister to look into the 20-point agreement leading to the formation of Malaysia and its consequential laws, Dr Mahathir said;

"We have already agreed that there is no way we can keep on reviewing this thing forever," he said.

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