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PM: Bakun dispute can be resolved (HL)

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PETALING JAYA, Tues. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad returned from his leave abroad today, saying that the Bakun dam dispute would be overcome and that the fight against corruption would not lead to a witch-hunt.

The Prime Minister said the Government had resolved thousands of other problems before, pushing aside any feeling that the dispute could not be resolved.

As for efforts to check graft, Dr Mahathir said:

"If it is necessary to clean up, we will clean up, as and when we get the evidence. But we are not going to go on a witch-hunt, which the Opposition would like."

Dr Mahathir was speaking to reporters upon his arrival at the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah International Airport in Subang after a two-month leave abroad.

The Prime Minister arrived at 5.40pm from Okayama, Japan, where he was on a working visit.

He was given a warm welcome by a huge crowd made up of Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and wife Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, Cabinet Ministers and their deputies, Mentris Besar, Parliamentary Secretaries, members of parliament, family members and relatives, leading corporate figures and well-wishers.

Dr Mahathir was asked a wide range of issues ranging from the Bakun dam to corruption and on the speculation against the ringgit and his trip abroad.

On Bakun, he was asked to comment on Press reports last week which said that a disagreement had arisen between project proponent Ekran Bhd and the contractor, Asea Brown Boveri over the engineering, procurement and construction contract.

The Prime Minister said: "It (the dispute) can be resolved. There is no such thing that it cannot be resolved. We have resolved thousands of other problems.

"There is no need to give the impression that it is going wrong and we are failing. Of course, this will make better news.

"Other people's misery makes good reading. But if you become the victim, then you won't think it is very nice."

Anwar who was acting Prime Minister when Dr Mahathir was on vacation, had directed Energy, Telecommunications and Posts Minister Datuk Leo Moggie to help the parties resolve the matter.

They are expected to meet at an undisclosed venue on Thursday.

Dr Mahathir said: "Some people may not be happy. They may have personal feelings about certain things, but we will overcome this. Bakun is a national project.

"The Government would not allow personal feelings or unhappiness to come in the way of a project essential to the country."

"All contracts can give rise to a dispute ... it can be resolved. We have resolved thousands of problems."

There was speculation that Ekran had wanted the Bakun construction contracts to go to companies linked to it or recommended by it while ABB, the Swiss-Swedish engineering group, had insisted on open tenders.

On corruption, Dr Mahathir said the Government would continue in its efforts to rid the nation of corruption, but over-reacting would benefit no one.

"We will act against people who commit wrongdoings."

Dr Mahathir was asked to comment on the 16-point declaration issued at the end of the "Consensus Against Corruption" conference last week which called for tougher measures to combat graft.

He said the Opposition considered the issues on corruption as the opportunity to become popular.

"In other words, they (the Opposition) want to politicise it. We are not politicising anything.

"We are trying to do something that is good for the nation. So, we don't need any public meetings, demonstrations with placards and things like this," he added.

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