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Mahathir-ringgit

RICH COUNTRIES ENJOY SQUEEZING POOR COUNTRIES, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 13 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the very rich countries enjoyed "squeezing" poor countries instead of helping them.

Dr Mahathir said: "What annoyed me is this kind of activities is actually being supported by very rich countries, and these countries don't even help poor countries."

He was speaking to newsmen after making a farewell courtesy call on the co-chairmen of Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Dr Haris Saladjic and Boro Bosic at Istana Hotel here.

"When they see poor countries, they try to knock them on their heads and yet they talk about justice, about democracy -- what democracy is this when the rich can squeeze the poor," he said when asked to comment on the current drop in value of the ringgit.

Dr Mahathir said these people did not care what they did to other people, and they thought that destroying the economy of developing countries was great fun.

"Of course they don't suffer. What do they care? They talk about human rights, poverty eradication and all that. They think this is great," he said.

"They do this for democracy, for freedom and for free trade. I'm not talking about anybody, you can make your guess," he said.

But Dr Mahathir said the Malaysian currency's fall was only temporary and the government was doing its very best towards a "final solution" to the problem.

The ringgit today dropped further to 2.786 against the US dollar from 2.765 yesterday.

Dr Mahathir said some European countries were already thinking of limiting their speculative trading on the forex market, but said: "I don't know whether we can do that or not. We're studying the situation and we're thinking of a long term solution.

"We'll recover," he said with confidence.

The Prime Minister remained relentless in his attack on speculative currency traders which have caused currencies in the region to take a severe beating in the last few weeks.

He said: "They can try their best to destroy us. They said no conspiracy, but whether there is conspiracy or not, the fact remains that they have done this deliberately knowing that the ringgit was sliding and they want to bring it down further."

Dr Mahathir said these people wanted to make money for themselves and money for the rich.

"This is the kind of jungle we're living, the so-called world and open market -- it is a jungle."

Asked on measures taken to review implementation of certain mega projects in view of the weakening ringgit, the Prime Minister said such measures were being taken but not because of the drop in the value of ringgit.

"We want to reduce imports because now imports cost a little bit more due to the value of the ringgit has come down. Therefore, for the time being we have to reduce imports," he said.

He said that these were only temporary measures and projects being reviewed looked big in terms of value but were not actually mega

projects.

Answering a question, Dr Mahathir said these projects were not being postponed but the government was only reducing certain imports in facing the current situation.

" Now our imports cost a little bit more because the value of ringgit has come down. For the time being, we have got to reduce imports but we will go on with these projects", he said.

He said what were construed as mega projects were not actually so.

" The private sector people build a whole town in Malaysia. You can see they don't build just one or two houses or even one housing scheme. They build a whole town complete with mosques, schools and all that.

" It is nothing, one of them cost about four or five billion ringgit by just one individual. So what is a mega project," he asked.

The Prime Minister said the government in most cases did not spend money on these projects as they were done by the private sector.

" But even if it is done by private sector, we still have to reduce imports," he said.-- BERNAMA

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