

23 MAY 1997

Mahathir-Land

SOME STATE GOVTS OUT OF LINE, SAYS PM

By: Azman Ujang

LONDON, May 23 (Bernama) -- Some state governments have taken actions which are "out of line" with that of the federal government, especially over acquisitions of people's land, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said here today.

And he made clear that such actions of state governments to repossess land are wrong.

Dr Mahathir said when the federal government recently made it easier to acquire land for development purposes, it discovered that some state governments acquired land in order to sell and made profit.

"This is wrong. That is why we have again revised the land laws. These are some of the things that happened although we try to do something which we think are good for the people," he told Malaysian journalists at his hotel suite here at the end of his five-day visit to Britain.

He said although land matters came under the jurisdiction of state governments, they were not free anymore to do what they wanted with the passage of amendments to the Land Acquisition Act.

This meant that state governments must conform to the federal policy on land acquisitions.

The Prime Minister said the federal government also planned to harmonise state administration of Islamic laws to also conform with administration at the federal level.

"We try to do this because at the moment Islamic matters are under the state rulers and sometimes state rulers feel that they should not conform to federal policies. But we can persuade them," he said.

Referring to his just-concluded mission here to promote Malaysia's Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC), Dr Mahathir said the attendance of over 1,000 top executives of information technology (IT) companies from all over Europe at the MSC seminar here Tuesday had given him extra confidence about the success of the MSC.

"In fact, to me there has never been a project in Malaysia which has been as well-known as the MSC within only a short time that we launched it," he said.

London is the third stop of Dr Mahathir's MSC road-show which previously took him to the West Coast of the United States and Japan.

He said he would next make a similar mission to the US East Coast but the timing has yet to be fixed.

Dr Mahathir clarified that although investors locating their operations at the multimedia hub would be treated as "special guests" of the country given the special sets of laws and incentives in place, this did not mean that Malaysia would be "one country with two systems".

He said there was nothing to worry about foreign IT corporations not taking Malaysian workers at the MSC because in any case, there would be a shortage of such knowledge workers when the hub became fully operational.

"In any case, Malaysian companies would employ Malaysians if they are available. But we won't insist they do so," he said.

The Prime Minister also said only activities related to IT would qualify for the package of incentives in the MSC, otherwise others not related to IT would move in only to take advantage of the package.

Among other things, the MSC does not limit foreign equity in projects and companies can bring as many workers from abroad as they want without the usual bureaucratic hassles.

Dr Mahathir said at the next summit meeting of Asean heads of government in Kuala Lumpur towards the end of this year, he would acquaint his Asean counterparts on the MSC.

"This is not so much to invite their participation but it would be good if we can work together to coordinate the development of the multimedia industry through establishing relationship," he added.

Asked about his meeting with new British Prime Minister Tony Blair at 10 Downing Street here Tuesday, Dr Mahathir said Blair was anxious to know about his assessment of the political situation in the Far East, especially in relation to China.

The Prime Minister is due to leave London Friday evening for his next destination -- a two-week vacation in Argentina. -- Bernama

AU RN