

07/10/1997

It's a deliberate attempt to get rid of me, says PM

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PRIME MINISTER Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad quashed rumours of his resignation, saying such talk was a deliberate attempt to force him out because of his views regarding the market turmoil.

"It never crossed my mind. When the country is in trouble, do you expect me to run away?" he said at the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah International Airport in Subang yesterday on his return from a 12-day trip covering Cuba, Chile, Uruguay and Argentina.

The Prime Minister said he was asked to confirm his resignation when in Argentina and he denied it.

"The rumours will persist because the aim of the currency traders, if not some countries, is to get rid of this chap who is criticising them and making suggestions. The criticism and suggestions have made people think and some are even beginning to accept the views," he said.

The ideas, he said, are gaining acceptance for example at the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

"In my discussions with Wolfensohn (World Bank president James Wolfensohn) and Camdessus (IMF managing director Michel Camdessus), they were equally not happy with the currency traders because their activities have made trading partners poorer.

"This not only affects their business but also the world trade. It is the currency traders that are in control ... and they also control the media organisations," he said.

The rumours of his resignation, reported in a foreign magazine, sparked a spontaneous gathering of hundreds of supporters at the airport to show their support for the Prime Minister.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, all cabinet ministers and Barisan Nasional supporters were at the airport to welcome Dr Mahathir home.

When asked if the rumours were "cooked up" by the Western media, Dr Mahathir said: "There is a definite attempt by the foreign media and certainly the fund managers to get rid of me."

Dr Mahathir said the so-called freedom of press in the West does not exist as vested interests are involved.

"The press is controlled by vested interests and anything which is against them will not be published.

"They have their own agenda and if we are not careful we will end up fighting among ourselves," he said.

The foreign media's agenda, Dr Mahathir said, is to put him and his deputy at loggerheads. As such, Malaysians should play into their hands.

Asked about reports suggesting that he and his deputy have given conflicting signals, Dr Mahathir said: "There are no conflicting signals... they (just) want to put me and Anwar at loggerheads.

"For example, they say Anwar is good, I am bad; Anwar is soft, I am hard. They say I will resign when I am back," he said, to laughter from the crowd.

Asked if there was any chance of the attempt succeeding, Dr Mahathir replied: "As far as my resignation is concerned it will be a futile effort."

Malaysians, he said, have the freedom to choose for themselves whether they want the country to be led by an elected leader or by foreigners with invested interests.

"We will fight on with the backing of Malaysians. We are an independent country with a democratic government. You can determine who the leader is," he said.

Asked if any Malaysians were behind the rumours, he said many people were hurt by the drop in the value of the ringgit and George Soros should take the blame.

On the suggestion that his outspokenness had caused the decline of the ringgit's value, Dr Mahathir said other currencies are affected as well, not just ringgit. Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines are also experiencing a crisis although their leaders do not criticise currency traders, he added.

"If people are angry at me, only the ringgit will drop ... it is just an excuse ... there is no good intention at all.

An article even said that the ringgit would rise when he goes abroad. But this has been proved to be another baseless suggestion, Dr Mahathir said.

"I kept quiet ... on Soros or anyone ... and I was abroad. We invited foreigner investors here but the ringgit continued to fall," he said.

On allegations that the currency crisis was due to weaknesses in the country's fundamentals, Dr Mahathir countered if this was the case how does one account for the fact that some poorer countries with high inflation currently have stronger currencies than Malaysia's.

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