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Anwar approved decision to buy new govt jet: PM

Kamarul Yunus

THE decision to purchase a new executive jet for Government use was made three years ago and was approved by then finance minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, says Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The new jet is to replace the present one which does not have sufficient range, he said yesterday.

"It is the Government's (aircraft), not mine. I don't have that kind of money," he said when asked about Anwar's claim that he had ordered a US\$50 million (US\$1 = RM3.80) jet.

Dr Mahathir was speaking to newsmen after launching the Proton Perdana V6 and Satria Gti 1.8 models in Kuala Lumpur.

Anwar, who was dismissed from the Government on September 2 and Umno the next day, is currently facing 10 charges of corrupt practice and sexual misconduct, all of which he has denied.

Dr Mahathir said Anwar had previously also used government jets and if he was still in the Government, he would be using the new jet too.

"We have been doing a lot of travelling. He (Anwar) did a lot of travelling too ... he used to borrow other people's jets. We don't like borrowing other people's jet. We would like to use our own jet," he said.

On the coming Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) meeting, Dr Mahathir said he hoped that it will focus on the present economic problems confronting East Asia and the world.

"We hope Apec will be able to decide on what needs to be done with regards to currency trading," he said.

Dr Mahathir was also asked whether the Cabinet has approved Renong Bhd's proposed RM10.5 billion debt restructuring plan.

"The Cabinet has looked into the proposal but has not decided on it," he said.

Among other things, Renong had proposed paying off the group's debts by issuing government-backed bonds based on the future cash flow and tax receipts of Projek Lebuh raya Utara-Selatan, a wholly-owned subsidiary of stablemate United Engineers Malaysia Bhd.

Asked about the reported resignation of two members of the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) International Advisory Panel (IAP), Dr Mahathir said Dr Kenichi Ohmae has not resigned but he was unclear about Alvin Toffler's position.

"I don't know about Alvin Toffler but I certainly know Kenichi has not resigned," he said, adding that in any case the MSC project would not be affected.

Dr Mahathir was asked for his comment on a report in the Far Eastern Economic Review that Ohmae and Toffler had resigned from the IAP over the sacking of Anwar.

The MSC is a dedicated 15km by 50km information technology zone located south of Kuala Lumpur which is being developed to serve as a global multimedia product manufacturing and services hub.

Dr Mahathir said he met Ohmae during his recent visit to Japan during which the latter had expressed his concern over the bad press Malaysia has received.

"Ohmae thinks we should correct the bad image and that he would help," the Prime Minister said.

On whether Toffler would be replaced if his reported withdrawal proves to be true, Dr Mahathir said the question does not arise as members come

on board all the time.

"We need to have the expertise of as many people as possible."

He also said about 36 companies have already moved into the MSC, while 100 more have indicated interest to participate in the project.

"British Telecoms is still keen to invest in Malaysia, while Japan's Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Corp is building a research centre here."

On Iraq, Dr Mahathir said he hopes there will be no attacks against the country over the UN arms inspection issue.

"I hope there is no attack. I hope people will sit down and talk to each other," he said, adding that Malaysia is against any physical assault, be it on an individual or a country.

He was asked to comment on the threat by the US and Britain to launch military strikes to punish Iraq for alleged refusal to cooperate with the UN arms inspection team.

Reports yesterday said American forces have begun to converge on the Gulf as Iraqi President Saddam Hussein remained steadfast in refusing to allow further weapons inspections.

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