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Dr M on new breed of African leaders

Ramlan Said

SEPANG, Sat. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said African countries now had a new generation of leaders who cared for their people and strove for development, a change which had been disregarded by the West and rich countries.

The Prime Minister said instead of appreciating this new leadership, the Western countries continued to harp on problems faced by one or two of the African States.

"The African leaders now are different compared to some of their predecessors who were dictators and only cared to enrich themselves by plundering their country's wealth.

"There is a new generation (of leaders) who are interested and enthusiastic in developing their countries and building a better life for their people. But, unfortunately, the developed countries are not interested."

Speaking to reporters at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport on arrival from a one-week visit to three African nations, Dr Mahathir said the West only saw problems in countries like Angola, Somalia and Sierra Leone.

"It seems that these rich countries do not want to see African countries prosper or develop. What interest them are matters like there is no freedom.

"But if they see any chance of making a profit, they will seize it," he said.

He cited the attack against the South African currency, which forced neighbouring countries to devalue their currencies so that they could compete with South Africa.

One of the African leaders, said Dr Mahathir, voiced his frustration over the attitude of the West.

When something happened to an African nation, the West would associate it with the whole continent.

"It can be seen that developed and Western countries are not interested in helping a developing country like South Africa.

"They failed to recognise the change in the attitude of the African leaders who are more focused on developing the economy of their countries and the people.

"This apparently does not seem to be appreciated.

"Like what has happened here, all they care to talk about is transparency and openness."

Asked whether it was now the turn of African countries to come under pressure after the collapse of East Asian economies, Dr Mahathir felt that Western countries did not care at all about helping the developing nations.

"Today, they do not mind destroying developing countries if money can be made out of it. They do not care even if they create misery among millions of people."

From his discussions with the African leaders, Dr Mahathir said they had noted the many similarities their countries shared with Malaysia.

They had expressed interest to learn more about Malaysia's approaches such as those related to the Bumiputeras and non-Bumiputeras.

The Prime Minister added that the South Africans would like to see more investments by Malaysia, besides co-operation in the banking sector.

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