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Mahathir-team

PM: QUESTION OF STEPPING DOWN DOES NOT ARISE

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 22 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the question of him stepping down does not arise because the government works as a team in tackling the country's economic woes.

"I don't hear anything about stepping down at all," the prime minister said in reply to a question by a foreign reporter of to whether he intended to step down owing to the current economic crisis.

He said the government did not function on the basis of individuality.

He said this after chairing the inaugural National Economic Action Council (NEAC) meeting at the Prime Minister's department, here.

The prime minister cited the National Economy Action Council as an example where they worked hand-in-hand in resolving problems faced by the country.

"We are a team here. We don't function just based on any particular individual," Dr Mahathir said.

Turning to the Australian reporter who had posed the question, he said: "That is a very indirect way of asking me when I'm stepping down, isn't it?... It's a very clever way of putting the question."

Dr Mahathir, flanked by Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and Economic Advisor to the Government Tun Daim Zainuddin at the news conference, said there was a need for everyone to work together.

He said this was necessary to face the current problems facing the country.

Asked if the NEAC discussed the increase in the prices of goods, particularly essential items, he said the government had yet to decide whether or not to allow price increases.

He said although the council discussed the matter, it did not make any decision.

"But we feel it is important for us not to cause traders to stop trading because they lose," he said.

To another question by the Australian reporter as to what Malaysia would do to improve ties with Australia during the visit by its Prime Minister John Howard to Malaysia on Feb 22-24, Dr Mahathir said: "Be friendly, I suppose." -- BERNAMA

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