

21 JUL 1998

Mahathir - Infrastructure

MASSIVE INFRASTRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENT TO STIMULATE ECONOMY, SAYS PM

SEREMBAN, July 21 (Bernama) -- Malaysia is embarking on massive infrastructural development as an approach to boost economic activities and generate spin-offs for other industries, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

This would entail increasing government funding for such undertakings, he said.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president, told a press conference this after a closed-door meeting with Negeri Sembilan Umno leaders and officials at the Wisma Negeri theaterette here.

A decision of the National Economic Action Council (NEAC), which he chairs, called for large-scale implementation of infrastructure projects, including those involving the construction sector, because in this way 140 other industries would also benefit, said Dr Mahathir.

"The bigger the construction the more economic activities," said the prime minister who was on a one-day working visit to the state.

In the interest of national development, infrastructural projects would inevitably have to be carried out to boost the economy, he said.

"We're not going to build only roads but in fact anything related to infrastructure. We'll spend money to have the spin offs and stimulate other industries," he said.

The people could now see that what the NEAC was doing was different from the approach of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in that the country needed more liquidity and not a credit squeeze as the IMF had suggested, he said.

In fact, the prime minister said the NEAC's strategy was a sound one.

"It's a right strategy because we followed the IMF and tightened liquidity, there's actually contraction in the first three months of this year," he said.

Malaysia would now have to relax the credit squeeze and pump in more money in order to create economic activities, Dr Mahathir said.

The prime minister was also asked about his deputy Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim being reportedly disappointed over the IMF's lack of transparency and inconsistency in salvaging countries hit by the current economic crisis.

Dr Mahathir replied that obviously Anwar was disappointed when aid to Indonesia was stalled despite the republic's long-standing request for assistance whereas Russia was reportedly granted AS\$17.1 billion in assistance with much ease.

The prime minister said the IMF should have been transparent in making decisions but the standard and method it applied in deciding was questionable.

When asked whether the IMF has a hidden agenda, Dr Mahathir said: "I'm not saying it has a hidden agenda but we find that the IMF is not transparent."

Asked on recent changes at the helm of key local media organisations, the prime minister said no one, including himself, could be in office forever and there would come a time for oneself to go.

"I suppose we are not permanent including myself, sometimes we have to go, but I hope when I go people will not make strange interpretations," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the media could play a pivotal role in revitalising

the economy but unfortunately at times they would only highlight negative reports.

Last Sunday for instance, he said, he toured the Kuala Lumpur City Centre (KLCC) complex where thousands of people were having a good time enjoying the facilities there and some of them expressed thanks to him.

The prime minister added that the national oil corporation, Petronas, had spent RM100 million to provide the public facilities there but the media have nothing positive to say about that.

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