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Protect Malaysia's image, urges Dr M

Ashraf Abdullah

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - The Prime Minister said today Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's supporters should not take to the streets and demonstrate against the Government during next month's Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation Summit.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said they should be responsible enough to protect Malaysia's image as a peace-loving nation.

"I am quite sure that they will come out with women and children (to demonstrate). This is what Anwar wants," he told a Press conference at the Prime Minister's Department after his five-day working visit to Japan.

Dr Mahathir expressed disappointment because the very people who were now demonstrating on the streets with anti-Government slogans were those who benefited from Government policies.

The Apec Summit will be held between Nov 14 and 18.

It will be attended by leaders of 21 member economies including United States President Bill Clinton.

Dr Mahathir also said he would not be pressured by Anwar's supporters into calling for an early election.

"I do not see why I should be pushed into an earlier election because that will have the effect of undermining our economic programmes," he said.

He was asked if he would call for an election to settle all issues "once and for all" as Anwar's supporters had been holding street demonstrations and had even urged the Yang di-Pertuan Agong to dissolve Parliament to allow for an election to be held.

Dr Mahathir said it would seem that the attempt to bring down the Government through continuous demonstrations was going on and would go on.

"We are quite prepared for that and when the time comes for the election, anybody can contest," he said.

Asked about the show of support for him (Dr Mahathir) by about 200 people outside the Philippines Embassy yesterday, Dr Mahathir said as much as others could express their views, those people could also do so.

"My worry is that if we make it a habit of taking to the streets, then of course this country will not be able to grow ... this country has developed because of political stability.

"What will happen, for example, if both sides take to the streets and they clash, then there will be fighting," he said.

The protesters had expressed disappointment over recent remarks by Philippines President Joseph Estrada on Anwar's arrest which was seen as interfering in the country's internal affairs.

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