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Special body to collect donations to aid recovery (HL)

Badrul Hisham Mahzan

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - Malaysians who want to donate to the country and help strengthen its foreign reserves can contribute to a special fund to be set up by the Government soon.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the donation could be in any form including property, belongings and cash.

"We can sell them to get foreign exchange and keep as part of our reserves," he said when asked by newsmen to elaborate on the Government's proposal to set up the fund.

Earlier in his speech when launching the Pelaburan Ehsan Wanita, a savings campaign for women, and Kongsi Raya celebration organised by the Wanita Barisan Nasional at the Putra World Trade Centre, Dr Mahathir said:

"The Government will set up a special fund, not for the purpose of buying shares, but to be used to strengthen the reserves. Anyone can contribute to the fund.

"The move will help the country's economy to recover."

Also present were Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, leaders of BN component parties, Wanita Umno chief Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman and heads of the various BN component parties' Wanita wings.

To a question, the Prime Minister said there would be measures to ensure proper accountability in the management of the public's contributions.

"A special body will collect all the donations the people want to contribute. We will designate specific places where the donations can be made and not just to anybody."

Asked whether the proposal meant that the national reserves had dwindled, Dr Mahathir said: "Any little thing the people can do to help themselves and not have to ask from other people is always good".

On the amount of reserves left, the Prime Minister said the country's reserves were sufficient and enabled Malaysia not to seek assistance from international agencies.

Dr Mahathir said he did not know how much the Government could collect from the donations but added in a lighter vein that the amount could be substantial if the Press were to help in the campaign.

Asked to comment on the action of a few United States Congressmen in trying to link the International Monetary Fund bailout to human and workers' rights, he said:

"When they allowed the currency speculators to devalue the currencies of these countries, the rights of millions of workers were taken away by them.

"The right to work, the right to have food, the right to have clothings and shelter ... these have been taken away from them. That is more offensive than whatever it is that the national governments of these countries have done.

"What about the rights of these workers? Millions of them are now unemployed and it is caused by the devaluing of their currencies."

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