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Dr M: We are willing to send peacekeepers to East Timor

KUALA LUMPUR Mon. - Malaysia is willing to send peacekeepers to East Timor if necessary, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan had asked if Malaysia would be willing to send troops and "we had already said yes".

"We are quite willing to serve in East Timor and if that is fine with everyone we will send our troops there," he told reporters after opening the 12th Commonwealth Law Conference.

Dr Mahathir was also asked about the criticisms against the Malaysian judiciary including the comments by Bar Council president R.R. Chelvarajah at the opening ceremony.

Chelvarajah had said some Malaysian court decisions in high profile cases had been adversely commented on, and these comments should not be brushed aside.

Dr Mahathir said it was the right of the conference delegates to discuss the administration of justice in the country.

"They probably have different perspectives (but) I hope that they won't have the preconceived idea that being a developing country we do not allow our judges to be independent.

"But if it is somebody who is loathsome, probably me for example, if I were to be brought before the court and the court decides against me, then, of course, the court is independent."

On US President Bill Clinton's support for Malaysia's views on international finance, Dr Mahathir said people were beginning to see that currency trading was very damaging to world trade.

This is because when a country loses its purchasing power, it cannot buy from other countries.

Asked to elaborate on his speech where he spoke about the "feudal" structure of the United Nations, he said there could not be reforms if reforms depended on asking the ruler to give up his power.

"He is not going to consent. So there is nothing much we can do. We (Malaysia) are a small country we have to grin and bear it.

"We have been talking and we will go on talking. We will get nowhere anyway," Dr Mahathir said.

Asked if his comments against free trade meant that he was calling for trade barriers to be erected, the Prime Minister said he did not mean that.

But he believed that there should be some form of regulation on trade.

On the law conference, he said he would like feedback on the administration of law in the country as well as for the lawyers to focus on behaviour of countries which were still far from democratic.

Asked to comment on Kelantan Umno liaison chief Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah's statement that the general election could be held in November, Dr Mahathir laughed and said: "He must know something which I don't."

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