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Mahathir-Media

DR MAHATHIR HOPES ARAB MEDIA WILL STATION REPS HERE

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 23 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today expressed the hope that the mass media of Arab countries will station their journalists here to get the actual picture of Malaysia which is frequently discredited by the western media.

The Prime Minister said usually the West Asian media did not have their representatives in Malaysia and as a result readers in their countries did not get accurate information about Malaysia as they had to depend on the western media.

"Malaysia indeed is not popular with the West and its media deliberately bad mouthed Malaysia," he told West Asian newspaper editors at his office here.

Dr Mahathir said he did not want the inaccurate foreign news reports to influence newspaper subscribers in West Asia leading to the friendly and brotherly relations between Malaysia and the Arab countries being jeopardised.

During the meeting which lasted nearly two hours with six newspaper editors from Eyypt, Libya, Sudan, Jordan and Pakistan, Dr Mahathir fielded questions on the economy, Malaysia's stand on currency traders, current political situation and human rights.

Also present was an advisor with the "Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs of Eyypt" Dr Mohamed Bahi El-Din Salem.

They are in Malaysia to study current developments and this country's economic development programmes.

On the possibility of an Euro type of common currency among Islamic countries, Dr Mahathir said this matter was still too early to consider as the level of trade among Islamic countries was still low.

On an Islamic common market, the Prime Minister felt this too was a bit early to consider as trade among Islamic countries was low and efforts should be made to expand it.

He was replying through an interpretor to a question from Dr Mohamed Bahi in Arabic.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia had begun investing in third world countries including Islamic countries as a way of speeding up a greater volume of trade and helping in the development of these countries but there was evidence to show that the West did not wish to see such relations being maintained.

"Their (currency traders) attack on the Malaysian currency has made us poorer thus affecting our ability to invest in these countries," he said.

Dr Mahathir believed that even though Malaysia had succeeded in countering the attacks which was also the source of the economic downturn in East Asia, the West would continue to prevent such a relationship.

He said Malaysia was fortunate in that before the currency attacks began in July of 1997, its economy was managed well and it did not have to borrow from other countries and this eased the debt repayment pressure.

"Malaysia concentrated on exports and this made the country the 17th in terms of world trade conducted," he said.

Malaysia's move to ensure that the ringgit did not have value outside of the country also restricted currency traders' attacks.

Dr Mahathir said with the move the Malaysian Government was in a position to determine the exchange rate of the ringgit on its own and currency traders were no longer able to apply pressure on the currency with

a view to bringing down its value.

"We will not allow our currency to be traded until the world comes up with a new regime on controlling currency traders," he said.

He said Malaysia's move was supported by many countries but not by the United States which was the biggest currency trader.

To a question from the Editor-in-Chief of the Al-Zahap Al-Akhbar of Libya Dr Abdul Kadir Ibrahim Al-Hadhiri, the Prime Minister said a second, third and many other Soros were likely to be born so long as many countries conducted their trade using the United States dollar.

"If we do not use the US dollar, its value will fall and it cannot be used to pressure others," he said.

Malaysia for instance used the US dollar in 70 per cent of its external trade even though trade with the United States was only 18 per cent of its international trade.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia also did not seek assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as it felt it was a Western tool to pressure other countries.

On foreign media reports claiming there was violation of human rights in Malaysia, Dr Mahathir said the West which often made such allegations was itself not free of the charge but it was not reported by their own media.

"The biggest human rights violations occurred in Bosnia Herzegovina and now in Kosovo and bombs have been dropped on several Islamic countries but these are not seen as violation of human rights," he said.

He said Malaysia was administered in line with the rule of law which applied to all citizens irrespective of rank or post as could be seen from the fact that even ministers had been produced in court on murder charges.

On the case involving former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Dr Mahathir said everyone should wait for the decision of the court which was independent and had never sided with the government.

"What is being claimed by the Western media is because they do not like the present Malaysian leadership...in fact they wish to see a change in leadership so that the attitude of dislike of the West will see a change," he said.

-- BERNAMA  
MNY AHH AAM