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Mahathir-Timor

EAST TIMOR ISSUE BADLY HANDLED, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

By: Amin Husaini Harun

NEW YORK, Sept 28 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has said that the East Timor issue has been badly handled by many parties which are known to have been agitating for the separation of the province from Indonesia.

He said many did not want the integration of East Timor with Indonesia and that they had always been agitating and urging East Timor to seek independence.

They had used the economic problems facing Indonesia to put pressure on the country to hold a referendum on East Timor, he said in a television interview with the Public Broadcasting System aired here Monday.

"I think it was a wrong time to hold a referendum," he said.

He said that after almost 25 years, East Timor had not been complaining very much as Indonesia had been pouring a lot of money into the province.

"Development of East Timor during Indonesian times was far greater than during the Portuguese times resulting in many Timorese accepting the Indonesian government," Dr Mahathir said.

Asked why a large majority of East Timorese had elected for independence, the prime minister said as in any election, the campaign by the various anti-Indonesia sectors were urging the people to reject Indonesia.

He said foreigners were telling Timorese "look if you become independent we will help you, we will give you protection, we will give you money. Naturally, the East Timorese will vote for independence".

He said the international community should have allowed Indonesia to make its democracy work.

"To apply pressure when one is in trouble is not fair. Indonesia was not in a position to even campaign among the Timorese.

"If you had allowed Indonesia time to make democracy work, surely the East Timorese can gain from being part of Indonesia," the prime minister said.

-- BERNAMA

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