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Mahathir-Election

MAHATHIR ELUDES ANSWERING ABOUT ELECTION

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 2 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said that the economic recovery will indeed have an effect on the outcome of the coming general election but he remains elusive whether the time is right to call for an election.

"This has an effect on the election, I'm sure," he told a news conference after delivering a keynote address at the International Symposium on Currency Controls and Asian Monetary Cooperation at the Nikko Hotel here.

Aug 6 next year is the latest date for the government to call for a general election but many quarters believed it would be held much earlier, perhaps as early as this month.

However, the prime minister said, the rural people were not really concerned about the economic recovery as "fortunately for us, the downturn has not affected the people in the villages because they produce their own food. They are not affected by import."

Dr Mahathir said oil palm small holders had benefited from the economic turmoil.

This was because the Malaysian currency has been devalued and they were selling in US dollars and earning more ringgit.

"So they were quite happy, they wish the turmoil would go on. Now that it has stopped, maybe they will not vote for the government," he said in jest.

Asked about the call by Amnesty International that Malaysia review some of its laws which it said had compromised the basic rights of Malaysians, the prime minister questioned the sincerity of the human rights group.

Among other things, he asked why the group had not stated its stand on the currency traders who had impoverished millions of people, thrown them out of jobs and caused them to riot, kill and loot.

"Their right to work has been taken away from them and not a word from Amnesty International.

"What has Amnesty International to say about the continuous bombing of Iraq, where innocent people are being killed, don't those people have the right to live," he said.

Dr Mahathir said if the West disliked Iraqi leader (Saddam Hussein), they should take action against him and not deny the people and children their rights to food and medicine.

"Amnesty International has nothing to say about that but they can see Malaysia, because from a million miles away they can see things. We have a Malay saying that some people can see a mosquito on the other side of the river but cannot see an elephant in front of them," he said.

London-based Amnesty International issued a statement yesterday calling on Malaysia to review some of its laws and accusing the government of compromising the basic rights of Malaysians.

It said the Malaysian government had step by step, undermined constitutional protection, weakened key institutions, and put in place an array of restrictive laws that stifled public debate and dissent.

-- BERNAMA

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