

02 MAR 1999

Mahathir-Policies

MINISTERS CANNOT HAVE INDEPENDENT POLICIES, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

By: Mikhail Raj

DHAKA, March 2 (Bernama) -- Cabinet ministers, including the prime minister and deputy prime minister, cannot have independent policies contrary to official government policies, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"Ministers cannot have independent policies as this would cause confusion and ineffectiveness," the prime minister said when asked whether a deputy prime minister should stay under the shadow of the prime minister or pursue independent policies.

This was raised at a news conference held at the end of the two-day summit of the group of eight Islamic developing countries (D-8) where Dr Mahathir fielded numerous questions on the sacking of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim as deputy prime minister last September.

"Ours is a joint responsibility, where Cabinet members have the same responsibility and we are bound to support whatever policies that the government decides," he said.

"There cannot be a minister who has his own independent policies as this would cause confusion and ineffectiveness," he said.

As for Anwar, Dr Mahathir said he initially believed and was supportive of tight credit policies promoted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in dealing with the regional currency crisis.

He said that Anwar eventually came around to the government's viewpoint of pursuing an expansionist monetary policy.

This saved Malaysia from the devastating social and economic effects of the financial prescription meted by the IMF where bank and company closures led to massive unemployment and consequent riots in neighbouring countries.

He reiterated that no one, be it the prime minister or deputy prime minister, a minister as well as government official, was spared from the law.

If they did anything against the law, they would be tried in the usual manner and face the consequences, Dr Mahathir said.

He also said that in Malaysia and in other governments, it was not unusual for ministers to be dismissed, but in Anwar's case, he could not accept it, prompting him to lead street demonstrations to overthrow the government.

Asked whether there was pressure from western governments to release Anwar, he said: "Apparently, many western governments would like Anwar to be released. He has many friends in the west, he is supportive of western policies."

"His views about the west differed from my own...I think they like him to be the prime minister, so they used the media and international organisations to twist our arm," he said.

"But we believe in the rule of law, be it for a friend or an enemy. It is applied equally to everyone," said Dr Mahathir.

He said: "Even the prime minister's decision has no more power to override the laws of the country."

On relations between Malaysia and the United States, he said they were very good despite the occasional hiccups, among which included Vice-President Al Gore's support for the "reformasi" movement and condoning street demonstrations, at the Apec summit last November.

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