

I am not going to Davos because I want to go home early, says PM

From Saiful Azhar

Abdullah

in London

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he was not going to the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, because he wanted to go home early, and not because rogue financial speculator George Soros is there as rumoured.

"Soros is a non-entity whom no one listens to anymore and whose book is drivel. He is a discredited player in the money market.

"Generally currency traders no longer move the market, although the banks still deal in currency," he said.

Dr Mahathir has blamed currency speculators like Soros for the regional financial crisis in 1997.

During his stay in London, Dr Mahathir said he would meet a few friends. Tomorrow he will travel to Paris for a meeting with French President Jacques Chirac.

On Sunday, the Prime Minister will meet Malaysian students at Malaysia Hall before leaving for Kuala Lumpur on Monday.

Dr Mahathir was also asked to comment on Pas' attempt to start a daily newspaper.

Dr Mahathir said the Government would have to scrutinise the application before coming to a decision.

Stressing that the Government was not against the setting up of newspapers, he said Pas' record in running its party organ, *Harakah*, would be "a factor in the decision".

Dr Mahathir said the Government was not against newspapers, but was against spreading of lies through the newspapers.

On his meeting with French President Jacques Chirac tomorrow, Dr Mahathir said it was an ongoing dialogue between Malaysia and France and the idea was to build closer rapport between the two countries.

He said both Malaysia and France were working together in trying to restructure the financial system of the world.

Dr Mahathir said Chirac was also

interested in joining Malaysia in assisting African countries, adding that he would also be meeting Citroen officials during the visit.

Proton and Citroen are looking at ways to improve technical co-operation on car production.

On the admission of two former Gerakan Assemblymen into MCA, Dr Mahathir said it would not affect Gerakan's position in Penang.

He hoped that such an event would not be a usual thing in the Barisan Nasional.