

PM: Help ensure country's economic independence

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We want to continue being free, therefore we must run the country and our finances efficiently, says Dr Mahathir

By DZULKARNAIN TAIB

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday called on Ministry of Finance officials to equip themselves with the necessary knowledge and constantly upgrade their expertise in managing the country's finances to ensure Malaysia's economic independence.

He said a weakening in the financial management of the country will result in the country having to beg from foreign aid agencies for help.

"If we are not efficient in managing our finances and not wise in our spending then we will be exposed to the danger of begging from others who wish to dominate us.

"We see that many developing countries have had to resort to financial help from foreign agencies such as the Paris Club and so forth. In the past we used to borrow from agencies like the World Bank but now we don't have the need to do so anymore.

"We continue to borrow but from those who do not impose any conditions on us besides giving us flexibility in our borrowing," Dr Mahathir said.

He added that in a challenging global environment the country cannot isolate itself from developments in other countries no matter how

far away they are.

The Prime Minister said the proponents of globalisation want to convince others that their concept is beneficial to all of them. However, he warned, it can be dangerous if the process is not handled in the right manner.

Dr Mahathir cited the attack on the country's currency during the Asian financial crisis of 1997 as an example of the dangers of globalisation.

"Their objective was to impoverish the country so that it would be forced to ask for financial aid and in this way they would be able to control the country's economy and finances," he said at a monthly gathering of Ministry of Finance (MOF) staff in Kuala Lumpur.

Dr Mahathir reiterated that Malaysia has been able to manage its finance and economy since Independence and it will continue to ensure

its freedom.

"We are still free compared to some countries which had to borrow. We want to continue being free and it is therefore necessary for us to run the country and our finances efficiently.

"The role played by MOF officials is very important in ensuring whether we will continue to be independent or not," he added.

The gathering was the first for Dr Mahathir since as-

suming the post of Minister of Finance last month.

He said that although ministers are changed sometimes, the ministry's staff are the ones who will continue with the financial administration of the country.

"I am thankful to the staff of the MOF for doing a good job and I hope in the course of being Minister of Finance I will receive the same support and service," he said.