

01/06/2001

Mahathir's view on Indon street demos

Habhajan Singh in Jakarta

JAKARTA, Thurs: Indonesian journalist were eager to find out what ran in the minds of the Malaysian Prime Minister with the Group of Fifteen (G-15) Summit being held in the midst of street demonstrations in the city.

Is it something that Indonesia should be ashamed of? asked one journalist during a press conference at the end of the two-day summit.

No, said Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Asked on his views on demonstrations, Dr Mahathir said that it all depended on how one viewed the matter.

"Some see it as part manifestation of democracy. On the other hand, we (must) also consider the people who want to do business without hindrance," he said.

The Indonesian city of 12 million people was engulfed in a political turmoil that saw a tense battle of nerves between supporters of President Abdurrahman Wahid and the other leaders.

Abdurrahman's supporters had begun decending upon the city in a show of support for the president whose presidency was on the line in a session at the Parliament.

Elaborating further, Dr Mahathir said that the authorities had to weigh carefully between the rights of demonstrators and those affected by the demonstrations.

After a couple of questions about the G-15 and related matters, the Prime Minister broke into a smile when one journalist asked a question regarding Anwar Ibrahim, the deposed former deputy prime minister.

"I think he saw it coming. At most press conference in Indonesia, the Anwar question will always pop up," said a member of the Malaysian delegation.

Dr Mahathir took the questions just like the others, plainly and calmly.

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