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BFA-REACTION

MORE DETAILS NEEDED ON DR M'S INFRASTRUCTURE TAX PROPOSAL

By: Yong Soo Heong

BOAO (Hainan), Feb 27 (Bernama) -- Foreign leaders are hoping Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will be able to provide more details on his proposed infrastructure tax.

Former Australia premier Bob Hawke and former Japanese premier Yashuhiro Nakasone both said it was too earlier to comment on the merits of the proposal until they both received specific details.

Dr Mahathir had suggested that an agency be set up under the auspices of the United Nations to collect taxes from rich nations so that funds can be mobilised to finance infrastructure programmes in poor countries.

This was because the cost of infrastructure was very high and the poor could not possibly build all their infrastructure by themselves, Dr Mahathir said in his keynote address at the inauguration ceremony of the Boao Forum for Asia (BFA) here today.

The Malaysian leader said development of infrastructure would be able to facilitate the development of countries through the creation of jobs and business contracts.

Nakasone, who said he had known Dr Mahathir for a long time and enjoyed working with the Malaysian premier at several international fora over the years, told a press conference here that no specific figures had been given as yet.

Hawke, who agreed with Dr Mahathir's capital for infrastructure was hard to come by among poor countries, said the Malaysian leader ought to flash out more details of his proposal.

Datuk Paduka Haji Suyoi Haji Osman, permanent secretary in Brunei's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, hoped that Dr Mahathir would provide more insights into his proposal so that there will be better understanding on the matter.

Some delegates to BFA who did not want to be named, said Dr Mahathir's proposal "hit the nail on the head" on the issue of sourcing for much needed funds for infrastructure development.

"Dr Mahathir's views are very pertinent for poor countries," said one of them.

However, former Philippines president Fidel V. Ramos said the proposed infrastructure tax could create some confusion.

He felt that more attention should be given to the development of human capital rather than infrastructure.

Ramos said he believed that development of human capital through education would go a long way towards helping to change conditions in poor countries and hoped that BFA would take that into consideration. -- BERNAMA

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