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Mahathir-Economy

0.5 to ONE PER CENT ECONOMIC GROWTH THIS YEAR- DR M

PUTRAJAYA, Dec 16 (Bernama) -- Malaysia expects its economy to grow by 0.5 to one per cent this year, the Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, said today.

"May be one per cent, of course it's very difficult...maybe half-a-per cent for this year. Next year will be better," Dr Mahathir, who is also Finance Minister, told reporters at his Hari Raya open house at Seri Perdana here.

He said already the country's economy was showing some signs of recovery from the initial shock of the Sept 11 terrorist attacks on the United States (US) and the people were now travelling again.

"I believe in one or two months people will be travelling, may be not in the same numbers as previously but sufficient to contribute to our economic growth...our economic growth for next year will be better from this year," Dr Mahathir said.

He said Malaysia's economy is "as well as it can be" considering that the world is going through a very bad period.

"We are a trading nation and if the world is not doing well obviously they cannot buy any of the things we produce, but we are generating economic growth through domestic activities and we can see that the retail business is very good...all the shopping complexes are full of people and they are not just there, they are buying things and I think that is good," he added.

He said the people were also using the Hari Raya holidays to spend their time at various resorts and that this was also good for the economic wellbeing of the country.

Asked about statements by opposition party leaders that the ruling Barisan Nasional would call for a snap General Election, he said he did not understand the opposition.

"I can't understand the opposition, on the one hand they say that this country is in a rotten state, that the economy is not well...if the economy is not doing well why should the government call for an election," he said.

He said normally the government called for an election only when it was going to win and when the situation in the country was very good.

"So are they admitting that the situation in the country is good and not as they say, so I can't understand them...they have a fixation about elections," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the government took elections very seriously and that it was the opposition who thought that elections was a "play thing."

"We take elections very seriously and will not call for an election just because we are sure of winning. In 1999 when the government had all kinds of trouble we still called for an election," he added.

Asked if there was a possibility of a General Election being called before the end of the present government's five year mandate, which ends in 2004, he said, "I don't know...I don't know it depends..I wouldn't know."

On another matter, the Prime Minister said at the 10-minute meeting between him and MCA Youth chief Datuk Ong Tee Keat in Kedah last week, the latter assured him (Dr Mahathir) that he was trying solve the internal problems of the party amicably.

"He (Ong) said he did not want to make an issue out of the internal squabbles and that he wants the problems solved amicably and I agreed that it is the way it should be done," he said.

On the Hari Raya celebrations today at Seri Perdana, Dr Mahathir said he was happy to see people from all walks of life celebrating the festive occasion.

"This is the unique thing in Malaysia where all races celebrate all the festivals in the country," he added.

-- BERNAMA

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