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PM: Beware of those who spread untruths

Abdul Razak Ahmad

THE Government's economic plans will fail if the rakyat is taken in by seditious comments by those who wish to see such efforts fail, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

The Prime Minister said much time and resources had to be diverted to explain the benefits of such plans to the people.

"We will have to go here and there to explain to the rakyat, consuming our time and energy to fight something which should not have been created in the first place.

"But because of these seditious comments, many things are abandoned and cannot be undertaken. Sometimes these people purposely incite the people asking them to refuse to be relocated and many others," he told a Press conference after presenting the Eighth Malaysian Plan in Parliament yesterday.

Asked how he viewed the acceptance and involvement of the people in economic plans such as the Eighth Malaysia Plan, Dr Mahathir said:

"If the people are not incited by sedition, I believe they will accept. All of this is for their benefit.

"But there will be those who will incite, there will be those who will spread untruths asking the rakyat not to accept (the plans)."

On whether the Government would review current or past privatisation projects which had received criticism, Dr Mahathir said the capabilities of those who undertook such projects would be examined closely.

"Sometimes they are too vulnerable, the slightest pressure and they can no longer continue.

"That is why we have to determine the capabilities of those who will obtain these projects."

Asked whether the selection criteria for awarding government projects would be re-evaluated, Dr Mahathir said:

"We want to know their financial strength, their background and experience.

"Usually we only choose those who have experience and who have proven their capabilities.

"We do not simply give to anyone."

Asked whether the Government would re-evaluate its public feedback system for projects, Dr Mahathir replied that the people's views had always been sought.

"If we want to build a toll road, we first ask the public whether they want it or not.

"If they don't want it, we won't do it. We consult the public first."

Asked whether the country's current economic situation would negatively affect projects in the Eighth Malaysia Plan, Dr Mahathir said:

"No it will not affect. Actually, we will increase the implementation of projects, because that is a way to increase economic development.

"So, even the upcoming projects which have not been scheduled will be hastened.

"This is what we call fiscal measures, which is, in times of downturn, we must have an expansionary budget."

On how the current economic situation would affect exports, Dr Mahathir said exports depended on demand.

"The problem for us is that when the United States economy slowed, we could not export many things to them because demand was not there.

Asked how Malaysia's exports would fare in the coming Asean Free Trade Area, Dr Mahathir said:

"Exports of most of the manufactured goods that have never been taxed have not been protected. They will continue as usual. But it is products that are protected, like Proton cars, for example ... so we may even have problems selling them in the country."

On whether Malaysia could maintain its 7.5 per cent growth target for the next five years, he said:

"Yes. When an economy shrinks this year, the next year's growth will be higher simply because the base is lower."

Asked whether the condition of the Japanese economy would affect Malaysia's growth forecasts, Dr Mahathir replied:

"The Japanese economy has been slow for quite some time. So Malaysia's growth has already taken into consideration the poor performance of the Japanese economy."