

PM: Govt trying to keep big firms going

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By SA'ODAH ELIAS

SEPANG: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has reiterated that the Government was not on a witch hunt or targeting anyone in particular by taking over big companies like Malaysia Airlines.

"We are not after anyone in particular or businessmen close to certain personalities. What we are trying to do now is to overcome problems faced by several big companies that are facing cash-flow problems due to the current economic situation.

"That is why we took over the companies, so that we can help them service their debts because the Government has the means to do so.

"Of course we cannot just give money to companies which do not belong to us, that is why we took over these companies," he told reporters on his arrival at KL

International Airport after a month-long holiday overseas.

He said the move was made because these companies had enough assets to offset their debts and the Government was confident that it would be able to realise the assets of these companies within a reasonable period of time either by selling them off or when the value of their shares increased.

The move, he said, must also not be construed as the Government bailing out anyone or that there were irregularities in the management of these companies.

"I am not trying to pin the blame on anyone but if there is any element of mismanagement this must be investigated and action taken accordingly.

"In the case of MAS, the decision to lodge the police report was made by the management of the company. The Government is only waiting

for the outcome of the ongoing investigation. This is not an effort to topple anyone and I hope (the) people stop speculating that we are on a witch hunt against certain people linked to someone," he added.

Dr Mahathir said if a crime had been committed, the problem must be handled by the proper authority as the Government was only concerned about the effect on the economy and their workers if these giant companies were not helped.

He said the situation needed to be explained clearly as the issue had been sensationalised by the media as a clear move by the Government against certain people.

When pointed out that the speculation was caused by

the fact that most of the businessmen involved were linked to the Government, Dr Mahathir said: "But all businessmen are linked to the Government. We are in the process of creating successful bumiputra entrepreneurs so we have to choose people who we believe have the capacity and capability but then they are called our cronies.

"If people start saying that everybody who we helped are our cronies, we might as well abandon the bumiputra policy," he said adding that the Government was trying to build a society that was equitable where the development of bumiputras and non-bumiputras could be equalised.

When pointed out that

everything had gone smoothly in the country while he was away Dr Mahathir said:

"I am glad, very glad. This goes to show that this country can be managed well because the system has been put in place and not due to anyone in particular including myself."

Asked if this reflected well on his deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Dr Mahathir said he was happy with Abdullah's performance.

"My deputy has done very well. He has conducted the Cabinet and Umno supreme council meetings and never once consulted me. He did not bother me and there were no phone calls," he added.

The Prime Minister also thanked the "extraordinary crowd" that greeted him at KLIA.