

Dr M: ECRL talks did not include the issue of Jho Low

PUTRAJAYA: Locating fugitive businessman Low Taek Jho did not feature in the renegotiations with China on the East Coast Rail Link, says Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"It had nothing to do with Mr Jho Low.

"But, of course we will seek the help of the Chinese government if he is at all in China," Dr Mahathir said while announcing the resumption of the ECRL yesterday.

The Prime Minister was asked if the successful renegotiation with China was linked to Jho Low and

the possibility of him being tracked down.

"It is not directly related but we are taking advantage of the signing of the agreement to work out purchase of palm oil ... that will happen," he said.

Asked if the initial cost of the ECRL project was inflated by the previous administration to bail out debt-laden 1Malaysia Development Bhd, Dr Mahathir said "yes."

He noted that the Barisan Nasional government gave out the ECRL project to a company through

direct negotiations and a lump sum payment, resulting in a high cost.

"That was what happened as the price was so high. We have reduced it by RM32bil.

"Had the project been handed out in the usual manner, we would have gotten a better price," he said.

Asked if the renegotiated ECRL terms had allayed fears of the nation falling into a Chinese debt trap, Dr Mahathir said there were initial concerns.

"But there is now a solution," he said.

He said Pakatan Harapan had raised this fear when it was the opposition.

Asked about Chinese companies being involved in future mega projects, Dr Mahathir said they could do so if their expertise was required.

"If there are mega-projects that we can give to the Chinese, we will.

"But our policy is to give mega-projects to Malaysian companies and if they don't have the expertise, they can call some foreign companies to come in," he added.

It had nothing to do with Mr Jho Low. But, of course we will seek the help of the Chinese government if he is at all in China.

Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad