

Britain returns Carcosa

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. — Carcosa will be returned to Malaysia. The British Government has decided to hand back the controversial home of its High Commissioner for a piece of land in the Ampang diplomatic enclave.

The grand white mansion built in 1896 for Sir Frank Swettenham, the first Resident-General of the Malay States, will now be turned into a guest house for State visitors, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He told reporters after chairing a four-hour meeting of the Umno Supreme Council this morning that no other compensation will be paid to the British but the provision of that free piece of land.

He did not say when Carcosa will be handed back to the Government but said the British High Commissioner can continue "to stay there until the time is possible for him to evacuate."

With the return of the colonial home majestically perched on a seven-hectare hilltop overlooking the Lake Gardens, the British High Commissioner will thus join his counterparts from other foreign missions to live in the Ampang-Pekeliling diplomatic enclave.

The call for the return of Carcosa was first made in 1982 by several delegates at the Umno and Umno Youth general assemblies. Even then Dr Mahathir had indicated that the Government would request the return of its 1956 gift to the British when he said "the Government must take heed of the feelings of the colonised servants."

But it was only early this year that the call gathered momentum when Umno Youth leader Anwar Ibrahim revived the issue and got the support of various groups and organisations.

However, the controversy surrounding Carcosa dates back to the very beginning when in September 1956, the then Chief Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman tabled a motion in the Federal Legislature that the Malayan Government would present this goodwill gift to the British to be used as the residence and office of the High Commissioner in independent Malaya.

He then Keeper of the Rulers' Seal said the gift was a "decision of major political significance to the country and the people" and criticised that the move was made without proper consultations with the Conference of Rulers.

He wondered also what public reaction would be on this special treatment of the British when missions of other foreign Governments would be located in the diplomatic enclave being developed off the Kenny Hill area. The Peninsular Malays Union also opposed the gift as did *Critic*, a Malay weekly edited by Umno founder Datuk Onn Jaffar.

Equality

He asserted it was not a symbol of the past relationship of "colonial masters and servants" but of a new one based on absolute equality.

However, as then and now, there were many in the country who felt that that special gift was indeed a symbol of the past relationship of colonial masters and colonised servants.

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