

Dr M on what caused the Baling tragedy

By NORHAWA YUNUS

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Sat. — The recent incident in Baling in which 18 people, including four policemen, lost their lives, was political in nature, the Prime Minister said today.

He dismissed claims by some quarters that the root cause of the incident was rural poverty, saying that rural poverty had existed since the days of the British.

"It is an old story. Rural poverty has existed since British rule. Why was there no such incident before?" he asked.

"Rural poverty has been there for ages," he said.

~~Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad~~ pointed out that there were other areas where there was rural poverty but the people were supporters of the Government.

"Because we are liberal ... we are democratic, they take advantage," he told newsmen after opening the 7th Asean Chamber of Commerce and Industry Conference at the Shangri-La Hotel.

The Prime Minister also blamed extremism for the incident.

"The main thing is because of the extremism of these people. It is related to politics," he added.

"One cannot dissociate completely the fact that Ibrahim Libya was a Pas candidate before. Pas does not support this kind of action, the fact is that he (Ibrahim Libya) got carried away," he said.

On Pas' call for a Commission of Inquiry into the incident, Dr Mahathir said that matters like that would have an official inquiry.

"What we do not want to do is make a public show of this inquiry so that political parties

could have a field day.

Criminal act

"What Pas wants is a political issue for it to sensationalise and not an inquiry," he said.

"They are not interested whether this country is peaceful or not."

The Prime Minister also said that it would appear that Pas supported such activities because it had not condemned it outright except for one party official who said that the incident was not related to Pas.

Pas deputy president Haji Fadzil Noor had said that the party had no connection at all with the activities of the people sought by the police and that the party members involved had acted on their own and not on any directives.

Dr Mahathir also dismissed as "sheer rubbish" claims that those who were killed had died in a holy war.

"What holy war? What is so holy about killing policemen performing their duties?" he asked.

He said resisting arrest was a criminal act and nobody should resist arrest.

The Baling incident, he added, started from an act of resisting arrest, causing the police to move in.

In doing so the police were careful not to hurt people so much so that some members of the police were killed.

"It is very unfortunate."

In the incident on Nov. 19, four policemen and 14 people were killed in a five-hour operation against 37 wanted men and their followers at Kampung Memali, Ceruk Puteh in Baling.