

PM on why Govt did not act swiftly

NST 17 NOV 1986

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. — The Cabinet did not take immediate action during the Selangor MCA controversy over the pribumi issue because it did not want to be accused of being oppressive, the Prime Minister said today.

He said the Cabinet wanted the people to realise the danger they were dragging themselves into before acting.

"So... when we act, they will understand why we have to do it," he added.

"It is not a matter of nipping it in the bud but of political acumen," he told newsmen after opening the MCA's 33rd general assembly at its party headquarters here.

Moderate

He was commenting on criticisms by certain quarters that the Cabinet did not act swiftly to get the Selangor MCA to retract its controversial resolution disputing the status of Malays as pribumis.

These critics felt that the Cabinet acted only when the situation was almost out of control.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president and Barisan Nasional chairman, said it was impossible for the Cabinet to get everyone to retract their statements on the Selangor MCA resolution.

He said all quarters were now happy with the settlement of the controversy.

The Cabinet agreed last Wednesday on a four-point plan to settle the is-

sue that included MCA's retraction of the Selangor branch resolution.

"The Cabinet has also decided that no more be said of the controversy," Dr Mahathir added.

On the relationship between Umno and the MCA after the controversy, Dr Mahathir said he was "generally happy" with the MCA leadership and its principle of inter-racial co-operation.

He believed that if the MCA continued to abide by this principle, the party would have a bright future.

But, he agreed that the MCA would not be spared agitation by members over certain communal issues, which was normal for Barisan Nasional component parties.

On the assurance by MCA president Datuk Dr Ling Liong Sik that the party would continue its moderate outlook, Dr Mahathir said this had always been the stand of the MCA. He said the MCA, like Umno, had always been a moderate party.

On perception by certain quarters that MCA leaders were extremists, the Prime Minister said the accusation had also been levelled at Umno party officials.

"This perception is normal but what is more important is whether political leaders can sit down, discuss and resolve an issue.

He said not everyone in either party might like the settlement of the pribumi issue, "but what is important is that the issue is resolved."