

PM: Royal Commission not necessary

DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday that a Royal Commission of Inquiry into the BMF loans scandal was not necessary as its only purpose would be to perpetrate a witch-hunt.

In this respect he also charged Opposition MPs with trying to conduct a witch-hunt over the scandal instead of paying enough attention to those who were clearly in the wrong as far as the scandal was concerned.

He added that they had also not paid attention to the loss of a large sum of money (\$2.6 billion).

Opposition MPs instead paid attention to aspects that could be politicised to achieve certain objectives, said Dr Mahathir, who was winding up the debate on the Royal Address for the Prime Minister's Department and the Home Affairs Ministry.

He said the Government had issued the White Papers on the BMF scandal and the Memali incident as well as the complete report of the Committee of Inquiry into the BMF scandal so that the people would get the correct information on these incidents.

He noted in this respect that the debate on the Royal Address did not focus on the contents of what was an important policy speech but concentrated mainly on the BMF scandal and the Memali incident.

The Prime Minister said the suggestion that a Royal Commission of Inquiry and a "special prosecution team" be set up to investigate the BMF scandal seemed to indicate a lack of faith in the final report of the Committee of Inquiry as well as in the Government agencies responsible for taking action with respect to crimes committed in the country.

He said the investigation of the Committee of Inquiry had in fact exceeded its scope of duty.

As for protection against legal action, Dr Mahathir said that the Committee of Inquiry like a Royal Commission was also protected.

In this respect, he said it was the opinion of lawyers in Malaysia that whoever was brave enough to sue the Committee for defamation would be questioned in court until worse revelations were made.

He said according to lawyers, "defamatory statements made in

the interest of the public are privileged... This would hold good even if the information contained is false."

He added that there were also many lawyers willing to defend the Committee of Inquiry if it was sued.

"What is the use of a Committee of Inquiry apart from perpetrating a witch-hunt to achieve certain objectives. The money that has been lost cannot be recovered through a witch-hunt.

"However, the unrest and the publicity in its wake would only affect the confidence of the people and the world in banks in Malaysia and its economy."

These, he said, could affect the nation's recovery from the present economic slowdown.

Insinuations

He stressed that it was not the intention of the Government to allow those who were responsible for robbing the nation to escape and that whatever action was necessary would be taken.

However, action should not be taken just to satisfy passions nor justice meted out through kangaroo courts.

In this respect, he said the report of the Committee of Investigation was not a police investigation paper because the committee members were not the police.

He noted that the report contained exhibits such as letters which had false signatures while letters from a criminal, entries in diaries and personal letters were recognised as true.

People had been implicated in this manner. He said if this was justice then anyone with a grudge could implicate another who could be charged and sentenced.

Dr Mahathir said it was the responsibility of the Attorney-General and the police to investigate till they are satisfied they have a case before initiating prosecution.

However, he reiterated that the crime was committed in Hong Kong where the Malaysian Government did not have jurisdiction. It could only co-operate with the Hong Kong Government as it was now doing.

However, wherever Malaysian authorities had the right they had acted. Assets of those clearly involved were frozen or taken over

by the Bank Bumiputra which was also taking steps to recover a part of the money that was lost.

Dr Mahathir thanked Tan Sri Ahmad Noordin and his committee on behalf of the Government for preparing a report that was comprehensive and useful and praised them for exposing those who had perpetrated the fraud.

He added that the final report would have been a classical work without comparison had it not been for the insinuations cast against people who were not given a chance to defend themselves and for the love of publicity shown.

He said it was because of the excessive attention paid to the BMF scandal that the Memali incident did not receive appropriate attention during the debate although the Memali incident was equally bad.

The Memali incident, he added, had exposed a crime of great danger to the nation.

"In the Memali incident, a group of fanatics had challenged the sovereignty of the Government. They did not accept the right of the police to enforce the laws.

"They had their own personal armed guards who were willing to kill. They had equipped themselves with all kinds of weapons that have never been used in Malaysia such as molotov cocktails, poisoned arrows and firebrands.

"They had also used women and children as shields for the men and deceived themselves into thinking that they were invincible. They were trained to protect themselves against various instruments of the police."

He said as a result of the Memali incident there were other groups who were of the opinion that if they opposed the police in large numbers the police would refrain from acting for fear of injuring people. Because of this there might be attempts by other groups to challenge the police.

Dr Mahathir said if the police could not act as agents of security then the people in certain areas would not feel secure. He said in this respect that *samseng* (gangsters) would try to do as they please as in the past.

"This is the danger of Memali. A bad example had been shown."