

Dr M: No need to declare crisis rule yet in Sabah

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. — The Federal Government will not declare a state of emergency in Sabah as long as it can be avoided despite the current unrest in the State, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said all efforts were being directed to stabilise the situation in Sabah to ensure that peace was restored so that elections could be held.

The Government, he said, was concerned over the current developments in the State but had to be careful because it was not only a question of security but also one of extensive political involvement in the issue.

Winding up the debate on the Royal Address in the Dewan Rakyat, he said the situation in Sabah was tense.

He referred in this respect to business that had come to a standstill in major towns and to schools being closed because

parents were uneasy about sending their children to them.

People in a number of areas were also not willing to leave their homes while there were those who were preparing to defend themselves or to "counter-attack".

The Government, he said, was trying to find a political solution. It was, however, regrettable that there were those who were not interested in this and wanted to use their own methods.

He said it was the hope of the Federal Government that the methods suggested by these people would not succeed.

"As the Federal Government, we cannot take sides but must ensure that there is peace and that elections will be held. The police will carry out their duties as usual without favouritism."

Dr Mahathir said police had so far arrested 800 people and those arrested who were not Malaysian citizens would be deported.

He said legal action would be taken against anyone found to be involved in criminal activities.

He added that the police were capable of maintaining security and that additional forces would be sent from the peninsula if necessary.

Speaking to reporters as he was leaving Parliament, Dr Mahathir said he might bring forward his trip to Sabah scheduled for next month.

When asked about the curfew imposed in the State, he said he was being regularly briefed by police and was monitoring the situation.

The Cabinet, he added, had also discussed in detail the situation and had decided on various measures to be taken but could not disclose them.

He said he wished to assure the people of Sabah that he was giving serious attention to events in the State.