

PM: Rise in serious crimes alarming

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By K.P. WARAN

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. — Serious crimes have been on the rise in the country and the Government is concerned that it may affect public order, investor interest and the tourist industry.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today there was a 39 per cent rise in serious crimes in 1987, compared with 1980, 80 per cent of which had been committed in the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Selangor, Johore and Perak.

Tabling the Emergency (Public Order and Prevention of Crime) (Amendment) Bill in the Dewan Rakyat, he said the Home Ministry took a serious view of such crimes in these States.

Appropriate action was needed to curb them.

Dr Mahathir cited murder, attempted murder, robbery (with or without firearms), rape and assault as serious crimes.

In 1980 there were 7,481 cases of serious crimes. In 1987, the number rose dramatically to 11,721.

Although the general crime index had dropped by 7.9 per cent in 1988 compared with 1987, the rising rate of serious crimes was still alarming enough and a cause for concern to the Government, he said.

Restrictions imposed

"One of the laws used to curb serious crimes is the Emergency (Public Order and Prevention of Crime) Ordinance 1969 which was enacted after the May 13 incident with the aim stabilising security and public order.

"Under the Act detention orders could be issued and restrictions imposed on criminals. But now the detention order issued by the Minister can be questioned in courts.

"One of the common methods is by obtaining a writ of *habeas corpus* to free those detained. After the person is released he can apply to the courts for compensation for wrongful detention.

"The proposed amendments are aimed at stopping courts from questioning the issuance of detention orders by the Minister except for non-compliance with procedural requirements," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the reluctance of witnesses to testify in courts was one of the main reasons why some of the criminals could not be prosecuted.

He added that gun smuggling syndicates, robbers and kidnapping masterminds escaped the clutches of law by going into hiding.

He said it would be easier to prosecute those caught

Security decisions based on expertise

NST 27 JUN 1989
★ FROM PAGE ONE

red-handed with firearms but for those who mastermind such crimes, the Government had no choice but to detain them under the Act.

"In many issues, the persons deemed to be experts by the courts are those who are trained and are responsible in the field. The experts in the field of security are Government officers, who are responsible for security and the Minister acts on their advice.

"Others cannot claim to be experts and should accept these decisions which are based on expertise," he said.

He said the Government, which was responsible for national security, must be allowed by legislation to take effective measures against those who threaten national security and stability.

He said the Government was the competent authority to determine the necessary preventive action needed to be taken for the sake of national security