

Dr M: ISA has been useful in quelling racial strife

By Antonius Tang

KOTA BARU, Fri. — The Internal Security Act has been useful in avoiding racial flareups, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The ISA was not merely to contain the communist menace, he told newsmen at the Sultan Ismail Petra Airport in Pengkalan Chepa here before leaving for Penang.

He was commenting on a statement by Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Ghafar Baba yesterday that the Government would study whether the ISA could be withdrawn in view of the move by the Communist Party of Malaya to end its 41-year-old armed struggle.

The Prime Minister said: "We have not made any decision yet but it (the ISA) is not solely used against the communist threat."

He said the ISA was used to prevent racial strife, as was the case in 1987.

Dr Mahathir said the situation had been tense that year, and "it had nothing to do with communist activities. It was a racial problem and we were forced to use the ISA, and the tension was immediately diffused."

He said the situation had been bad before the ISA was used, but people seemed to have forgotten this because there was no longer any tension.

Dr Mahathir said many people fled abroad when there was a shooting incident involving a mentally-unsound soldier which was not related to racial tension.

"Parents kept their children away from school and the whole of Kuala Lumpur was in a state of fear. The people feared a repeat of the racial troubles of 1969.

"We used the ISA to isolate those who had created the racial tension. When they realised what they had done, we released all of them," Dr Mahathir said.

All this showed how useful the ISA was to a multiracial country, he added.