

# Prisons revamp: Police structure to be imposed

By Sabry Sharif

**KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs.** — The Prisons Department will be restructured along the lines of the Police Department under the Government's revamp of the prison system, the Prime Minister said today.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said that this would be the task of former police director of internal security and public order Datuk Mohamed Yassin Haji Jaafar, who today assumed the post of director-general of the Prisons Department.

He said the Government wanted a new prison structure with tight discipline among warders and other officials to ensure security.

"After a careful study, the Government feels the police structure is the best model for restructuring the Prisons Department as it stresses discipline and security," said Dr Mahathir,

who is also the Home Minister.

He said it was for this reason that the Government decided that the best person to lead the revamp would be a senior police officer.

He also believed that it would be better to appoint an outsider to lead the department as he would have a better perspective on what ills plagued the prison system.

Although it was the first time that a police officer had been appointed to head the Prisons Department, he said it was not against any civil service regulation on appointments and transfers.

"We could have a top army officer to head the department but the military may not be as familiar as the police in dealing with civilian laws."

He was speaking to newsmen at the Kuala Lumpur

International Airport upon his return from Lusaka after meeting anti-apartheid leader Nelson Mandela.

He was explaining the appointment of Datuk Mohamed Yassin, 53, to replace Datuk Nik Ariffin Nik Omar, who retired from the Prisons Department recently.

Dr Mahathir had announced a total shake-up of the Prisons Department last month following the Abdullah Ang "privileged prisoner" controversy and several prison breakouts.

A special Home Ministry panel which investigated the Abdullah Ang affair blamed the incident on weaknesses in the prison system while the police had attributed the prison breakouts to staff negligence and poor security.

On Datuk Yassin's priorities, the Prime Minister said they would be to restore discipline and improve

security at the country's prisons as well as to identify and overcome weaknesses.

He said Datuk Yassin did not need any mandate from him as he had the authority and power to carry out his task in his capacity as the director-general of the Prisons Department.

He said he had not given Datuk Yassin a deadline to complete the revamp.

He also said that several other "outsiders" — diplomatic and administrative service officers — would be seconded to the department soon as part of the revamp.

Asked if prisons staff were opposed to the appointment of an outsider as their director-general, Dr Mahathir said that this was not the case.

He said the staff had welcomed this move and were anxious to see the various weaknesses removed.