

NOT SO NEUTRAL

Dr M: Commonwealth observers may be biased

By K.T. Arasu

MUAR, Sat. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has expressed doubts over the neutrality of the two Commonwealth observers.

The Prime Minister said that Commonwealth secretary-general Chief Emeka Anyaoku had sent the two observers based on the request of Election Watch which alleged that the Government was unfair and did not abide by the laws.

"Election Watch had written to the secretary-general and the team has apparently been sent in response to this because we have not made an official request," he told reporters after addressing a large gathering here.

Dr Mahathir said that in view of this he felt that the observer team would be prejudiced against the Government.

He said that he would discuss the matter during a Cabinet meeting but added that the Government would not take action against Election Watch because "it had a right to do what it wanted."

Dr Mahathir said he thought that the Commonwealth secretariat would not bother with the letter from the Election Watch.

"But I was surprised when the secretary-general sent the two observers based on their request," he said.

Dr Mahathir regretted that Election Watch had managed to influence the

Commonwealth secretariat and thereby compromising the team's neutrality.

"We wanted a neutral body to oversee the election because Election Watch and the opposition parties have been casting doubts on the fairness of the polls," he said.

"But now our intention of having a neutral body to oversee the election has been jeopardised."

Dr Mahathir said that former Commonwealth secretary-general Sir Shridath Ramphal had initially written to him asking him to obtain an agreement from opposition parties on the sending of the observer team.

"I agreed to the request and even met DAP secretary-general Lim Kit Siang. We have drawn up the guidelines on how the team would work," he said.

However, he said, the team was sent before he could reply to the letter and that it had met with Election Watch, which was "what we wanted to avoid."

Dr Mahathir said the Government would now have to "review the situation" because it feared that the team was no longer neutral and had met opposition parties which it was not supposed to.

Also present at the gathering, the second stop of the nationwide tour by Barisan leaders, were Mentri Besar Tan Sri Haji Muhyiddin Mohamad Yassin, MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu and Gerakan president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik.