

DR M: VIOLENCE IS NO WAY TO SOLVE ISSUE

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SUBANG, Tues. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the Government is willing to consider appeals by Cheras residents on the toll issue but reiterated that violence is not the way to resolve any problem.

The Prime Minister said that resorting to violence in a show of people's power was not the way to settle issues in Malaysia.

He said people's power could be voiced through the vote or discussion.

"For example, when there is opposition to matters relating to the New Economic Policy and the Education Act, we call for discussions.

"We sit down like civil servants at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport before leaving for South Korea for a four-day official visit.

A number of Cheras residents had been holding demonstrations at the 8km toll plaza the past few nights to protest against the \$1 toll im-

posed on Sept 1 which they considered too high.

The demonstration on Friday night became ugly when a section of the crowd threw stones and bottles, forcing police to fire tear gas to disperse the gathering.

Dr Mahathir said opposition parties had attempted to exploit the situation for political gain by using "people's power." "This is not proper. The opposition was out to use the people's power as they have no power, being outside the Government. We cannot accept this," he said.

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However, he said, the residents of Cheras need not have taken their grievance to Mr Lee because the Barisan Nasional also had its representatives in the area.

He said the Barisan representatives had already met him on the matter.

"We have discussed the matter. It can be resolved provided there is no rioting. This is the work of a small group out to get political advantage," he said.

Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Ghafar Baba said it would cost the Government about \$200 million in subsidies if it reduced the toll charges by 50 per cent.

"If the Government finds a way to reduce the toll, we will do so. But this will depend on the extent of the burden the Government will have to bear," he told reporters after opening a seminar on "Economic Development and

The toll issue is expected to be discussed by the Cabinet at its weekly meeting to be chaired by Encik Ghafar tomorrow.

Encik Ghafar said one suggestion the Cabinet might look into was extending the period for toll collection from 12 years if

the toll were reduced. "The Cabinet may discuss this option," he said.

He said he would have to look at the agreement between Teratai K.G. Sdn Bhd and the Government to see how far the Government was bound by the contract.

Teratai undertook to build five fly-overs over roundabouts at Jalan Cheras, Jalan Loke Yew and Jalan Tun Razak at an estimated cost of \$300 million.

Encik Ghafar said the toll charge of \$1 was recommended by the Works Ministry.

"The Cabinet approved it after considering the construction and improvement cost to the five interchanges," he said.

Its main consideration when making the decision was to get back the money spent on the improvement works."

On the outcome of his meeting with Federal Territory MCA yesterday over the toll issue, he said

he was still studying the memorandum handed to him by the party.

Asked whether the Government had held discussions with Teratai following the strong protest, Encik Ghafar said:

"Any negotiation with Teratai will only be held after the Government is convinced that there will be no more outbreak of violence over the toll issue.

"As Dr Mahathir had said we will not start looking for a solution as long as it gives an impression that the Government will bow to demonstration and violence," he said.

"If this happens it will only encourage others to demonstrate and possibly use force. Then there will be chaos in the country," he said.

"It cannot be entirely done because this will mean the Government will always have to subsidise road improvement projects within city limits," he said.