

Polls speeches did not warrant arrests

SPEECHES made by opposition leaders during the last general election campaign may have been considered "inflammatory" but were not serious enough to warrant police action, Home Affairs Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad told parliament yesterday.

Replying to a supplementary question from Mr Lim Kit Siang (DAP-Tanjong), Dr Mahathir said the Home Ministry, on the advice of the police, did not arrest anyone as the situation did not reach dangerous levels.

Dr Mahathir said the situation was unlike the one in 1987 when the actions of political leaders from all parties created dangerous racial tension and had to be nipped in the bud.

"Things had reached such a level that 20,000 people ran away to Singapore, people were hoarding food and parents were afraid to send their children to school.

"The Government had to arrest those responsible, irrespective of their party affiliations," he said.

Replying to the original

question from Haji Buniyamin Yaakub (PAS-Bachok), Dr Mahathir said sensitive issues on race and religion could not be suppressed in a multi-racial society.

"Problems arise when irresponsible political leaders exploit these sentiments without regard for its consequences," he said.

Dr Mahathir said action in the form of "Operasi Lalang" had to be taken early to avoid civil strife and bloodshed.

"Those arrested were not only opposition party members but included 14 leaders

from the Government's component parties.

"This shows the Government does not discriminate when dealing with matters which may affect our stability and national security," he said.

Replying to Haji Hadi Awang (PAS-Marang), Dr Mahathir said Government leaders did not abuse their position when making speeches during official functions.

"Whatever they say is relevant for the prevailing situation," he said.