

Rulers who flout law will ruin their image, Says Dr Mahathir

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ALOR STAR, Mon. — Rulers will ruin their image (*mertabat*) if they flout the law, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The action by the Sultan of Kelantan, who drove off with a car without paying the import duties, clearly showed that the Ruler had been unethical and that was why the newspapers were writing about the issue, he added.

Dr Mahathir was asked by newsmen whether newspaper reports on the issue of the Sultan of Kelantan driving off with the *Lamborghini* Diablo from the MAS cargo terminal at Subang airport without paying Customs duties of \$2.1 million on March 19 would affect the Ruler's image.

The Prime Minister arrived at the Sultan Abdul Halim airport here to break fast with the *rakyat* at the

Bukit Tinggi mosque in *Kepala Batas*.

He said the newspapers had to report the issue because the Sultan had flouted the law.

"Furthermore, the newspapers have to defend themselves because they are being blamed in the issue."

Dr Mahathir said the issue would not have been highlighted in the mass media if the Kelantan State Government had made the right stand on the Sultan's right to buy cars.

"It is unfortunate that the State Government is trying to defend something which is wrong by contending that it has given permission to the Ruler to buy an unlimited number of cars.

"It is not the right of the State Government to determine the number of tax-exempted cars a Ruler can buy. It is the right of the Federal Government.

"We believe the State Government had also taken the stand that the Ruler is not bound by any code of ethics other than those in the *Quran* and the *Hadith*.

"We believe that the State Government had advised the Ruler that he is only bound by the *Quran* and the *Hadith*," said Dr Mahathir.

Asked how the issue could be solved, Dr Mahathir said the Sultan had to pay the duties on the car.

"If he does not pay the duties, he is flouting the law," he added.

On the offer of Proton shares to the Sultan of Kelantan, Dr Mahathir said the Government offered the shares to all the Rulers because one of them had made a request to buy the shares.

"We are of the opinion that we cannot offer the shares to only one Ruler and therefore, to be fair, we offered the shares to all the

Rulers regardless of whether they are siding the Government," he added.

Dr Mahathir said the offer of shares to Rulers was not a Government policy.

"That is why although the Sultan of Kelantan did not request the shares, we made an offer to him to be fair to all the Rulers," he added.

It was reported today that copies of a letter of offer for the shares to the Sultan of Kelantan were widely distributed in Kota Baru.

In *Kuala Lumpur*, International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz said all the Rulers and Yang di-Pertuas Negeri except the Sultan of Kelantan had accepted the Ministry's offer to take up the *Bumiputera* portion of shares in *Perusahaan Otomobil Nasional Bhd*.

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Share offer made 'in good faith'

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She said the Rulers were offered 100,000 shares of \$1 each and the Yang di-Pertuas Negeri 50,000 shares each, at the offer price of \$5 a share in Proton's public issue in February.

"The Government made the offer in good faith to allow the Rulers and Yang di-Pertuas Negeri to participate in the public offer along with the *rakyat*," she added.

Commenting on a news report today that copies of the Ministry's offer letter to the Sultan of Kelantan were being circulated in Kelantan, she said: "I was told that the Sultan had rejected the offer for fear the issue may be used against him in the next Umno general assembly."

Proton, listed on the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange last week, made a public issue of 30 million new ordinary shares of \$1 each and an offer for sale of 120 million ordinary shares of \$1 each at \$5 a share.

The Inspector-General of Police, Tan Sri Haniff Omar, also said in Kuala Lumpur today that police personnel on duty at the Istana Kelantan (in Kuala Lumpur) on March 19 were directed not to obstruct Customs officers investigating the luxury car caper.

Speaking to reporters at

the General Hospital after distributing Hari Rava food parcels to police personnel at the urology and orthopaedic wards! he said he issued the directive as the Customs officers were empowered under the law to carry out such investigations.

In his first comment on the controversy, he also said the police had not been approached by the Customs Department to help them resolve the issue.

He added that the police would have to refer to the provisions of the law if their help was enlisted by the relevant authorities.

In Kota Baru, a Kelantan palace official said the Sultan was allowed by the State Government to use the *imam, penggawa and penghulu* to defend his actions.

The Sultan's private secretary, Encik Fuad Hassan, said the use of the State officials was an effort by the Sultan to counter biased newspaper reports.

He told the *New Straits Times* that the *rakyat* needed to know the real issue behind the purchase of the Sultan's car and only through the State employees could the information be disseminated.

The palace officials had so far met the *imam, penggawa and penghulu* twice — last Wednesday and yesterday — to explain the matter. The meeting was held at the Istana

na Balai Besar.

Fuad said the Federal authorities and the mass media were trying to harp on moral values and emphasising the excessive expenditure of the Sultan in buying a number of luxury cars.

"Unless they are able to tie up the moral values to the legal point of view, the Sultan had not committed any wrong," Fuad said.

He said when the issue first erupted, the Federal authorities were harping on the legality of the Sultan retrieving the car but after the palace and the Kelantan Government had proved that the Sultan had only taken what was legitimately his, the Federal authorities and the media began a barrage of attacks on the moral values of the Sultan.

He also said a palace official was seeking an appointment with Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik to personally hand him a cheque for \$15,000 for the payment of air freight and storing charges of the luxury car at the MAS cargo terminal.

Fuad said that even though the payment was due to MAS, the Sultan has directed that the cheque to be handed to Dr Ling personally.

"The Sultan is chagrined by Dr Ling's statement in the papers which implied that the Sultan had, apart

from refusing to settle the \$2.1 million import duties, also refused to settle the \$15,000 in MAS charges.

"We want to see Dr Ling personally and hand him the cheque because there are a few things which the Sultan wants to be conveyed to the Transport Minister," Fuad said.

Dr Ling said last Wednesday MAS should send the \$15,000 bill to the Kelantan palace for airfreighting the Lamborghini Diablo from London and storing it in Subang.

He said the bill should be sent as soon as possible, if it had not been done, as it was a normal commercial practice.

Asked why there was a delay in making the payment, Fuad said the palace only received the invoice from MAS on Saturday and it was not possible to get in touch with the Minister that day.

"Yesterday was a Sunday and attempts, to fix an appointment with him were futile.

"We are still trying to fix an appointment with him today and if he agrees to it then we will be meeting him to hand over the cheque and give him a piece of the Sultan's mind about his state ment," Fuad added.

Meanwhile, Dr Ling when contacted in Kuala Lumpur, declined comment