

PM: PUBLIC FIRST

'Public interest foremost consideration in sentencing'

By PAUL GABRIEL

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LANGKAWI: Public interest should be the foremost consideration when the courts sentence an offender, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

"It is well-accepted the public interest takes priority in all sentencing.

"But the perception of the public may differ from that of the judges," the Prime Minister told newsmen at the airport after a whirlwind inspection of development projects.

Dr Mahathir was asked about the conflicting views expressed by Law Minister Datuk Syed Hamid Albar and Lord President Tun Abdul Hamid

Omar over the issue of sentencing.

Abdul Hamid had last week rejected the minister's suggestion of a new approach in sentencing to reflect the people's wishes.

He had said there was no such thing as a new approach as the principles of sentencing were well-established and that the courts applied these principles when passing sentence.

Abdul Hamid had said the minister's remarks, if not clarified, could mislead the people into believing the courts were not functioning as they should and that justice was not being administered with law.

Syed Hamid responded by saying that sentencing was always a matter of public interest and some countries even had policies on public interest.

He said the judiciary should be seen to be free of any pre-determined views or opinions.

Dr Mahathir described the tiff between Syed Hamid and Abdul Hamid as due "to a difference of opinion."

"The minister has given an explanation and I think there is no problem," he added.

Dr Mahathir was also asked about the RMAF's decision to withdraw the services of its 23 pilots and ground crew seconded to fly and maintain the aircraft of the Sultans of Pahang and Johor from May 1.

The Prime Minister said it was the RMAF's prerogative to do so as there were no provisions in the

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law for such services.

On the presence of troops in Sabah, Dr Mahathir said there was nothing "extraordinary" about their number.

He said troops were being maintained there to protect the state from the threat of piracy and undesirable elements.

Commander of the 5th Brigade, Brig Jen Datuk Jelani Asmawi, was reported as having said on Saturday that certain sections of Sabahans were unhappy with the troops' presence.

Dr Mahathir, who arrived here at 9.20am in an executive jet, earlier visited Burau Bay where 300 chalets are to be built before the Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition (Lima '93) from Dec 7-12.

He trekked through the rainforest for about 30 minutes and was accompanied by Berjaya Corporation boss Tan Sri Vincent Tan, Langkawi Development Authority deputy general manager Abdullah Sani, district officer Ku Nahar Ku Ibrahim and other officials.

The Prime Minister also went by helicopter to Pulau Rebak Besar and then visited the multi-million ringgit crocodile farm in Teluk Datai here.

The farm has 1,000 crocodiles and will open to the public from Thursday.