

PM: CABINET PANEL FASTER

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BUKIT MERTAJAM: The Government prefers to receive the report of a Cabinet committee looking into the Highland Towers tragedy so it can start investigations at once, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

He said the Cabinet had not decided whether to set up a royal commission of inquiry into the disaster as past experience had shown that such inquiries took a long time.

"We also have to study all recommendations and sometimes we are unable to implement these measures," he said after launching Otis Manufacturing Co Sdn Bhd yesterday.

He said with the Cabinet committee

report, investigations could be conducted immediately with the help from government departments and private sector.

"This will help us to formulate policies to prevent such tragedies from happening again," he added.

Dr Mahathir thanked all parties, including the foreign rescue teams, who had helped in the search-and-rescue work.

In Kuala Lumpur, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said the country was likely to seek expert opinion on the safety of hillside condominium projects.

He said all new approvals for such projects would stay frozen.

Anwar, who chairs the Cabinet Committee on the Highland Towers disaster, also said the Cabinet would decide today on the status of on-going condo-

minium and high-rise projects.

He chaired a 2½-hour meeting of the committee yesterday.

Anwar told the Dewan Rakyat later that the Cabinet Committee would recommend to the Cabinet today to make the committee's report public.

He was winding up the debate on the Finance Ministry on the mid-term review of the Sixth Malaysia Plan.

Anwar said: "What we want now is to recommend to the Cabinet that we include condominiums which are under construction because there are some condo blocks which were built very quickly and in big numbers, thus raising much worry, so we recommend that immediate action be taken."

He also refuted opposition allega-

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Anwar explains switch in command at site

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tions that there was no direction for the rescue workers for the first three days. He said when he arrived at the scene in Hulu Klang a few hours after it happened, steps had been taken.

On claims that the switch in control of the rescue operation from CID director Datuk Zaman Khan to Inspector-General of Police Tun Hanif Omar and then to Acting IGP Tan Sri Abdul Rahim Nor had adversely affected the operation,

Anwar said this was unfounded.

"Since Zaman Khan was the first to arrive, he took charge. When the IGP arrived, he took charge and later Tan Sri Abdul Rahim. Whoever took charge is immaterial. If did not affect the

quality of work," he added.

On the suggestion that the views of the relatives of the victims should have been sought, Anwar said it was not reasonable as they were emotionally upset.

"But I did discuss with

some of them and sought their opinion. I myself was very impatient. The French said if we did it the aggressive way, they would withdraw as it would endanger all the lives; the Japanese said that and the Singaporeans said that."

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