

PM afraid bookies may turn to fixing elections

By Saiful Azhar Abdullah

LANGKAWI, Mon. — The Government is worried that soccer bribery may spread to other areas including the elections and is out to put a stop to it, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"I am not well versed in football... all this while I thought the winners were genuine winners and the losers too were genuine losers. I was shocked when I heard about bribery in sports," he said adding that the activities of the illegal bookies must be stopped.

He said if the bookies were willing to offer money and many other things to ensure one side wins, the Government was concerned that this may extend to even fixing the results of elections.

Responding to reporters' questions at the newly-opened Langkasuka Resort, he said, the Government will take all necessary action to combat bribery in football to prevent it from spreading.

Dr Mahathir, on the island for a two-day private visit, had earlier visited several development projects.

He said the bookies, when they realised that one team was about to lose, may offer money to the prospective winner to lose the game.

When asked what action would be taken by the Government to control the bribery problem, Dr Mahathir said: "We will take all necessary action when we get information."

He also said it was important for the people to make their stand on bribery.

"What is important is the perception of the people. If we believe we should earn a living through honest means, such a situation will not arise," he added.

(The match-fixing scandal in football has made headlines over the past few weeks. A police crackdown has resulted in the arrest of about 50 State and ex-State players and a coach).

Asked to comment on a call by some quarters to the Government to cancel its proposal to purchase MiG-29 jet fighters from Russia in view of the republic's stand on Bosnia-Herzegovina and the use of its military might in Chechnya, Dr Mahathir said:

"The situation has not reached a stage for Malaysia to cancel the purchase of the jet fighters.

"At the moment we are not thinking of it, probably later we may think of it.

"At the moment, we find that even the Russian people are not happy with the (military) action," he added.

On Friday, Asian regional representative to the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY) Mad Tahir Anuar called on the Government not to purchase MiG-29 fighter aircraft in view of Russia's attitude towards the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the use of force in Chechnya.

It was reported today that about 1,000 Chechnya soldiers have been killed in their bid for independence from Russia.