

Dr Mahathir: Certain weaknesses need Review of Land Acqui

to be rectified sition Act

**By Saiful Azhar
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BALING, Thurs. — The Government is reviewing certain provisions of the Land Acquisition Act 1960 to rectify its weaknesses, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said the amendments, however, could not be made at next month's Parliament meeting because the matter was still under review.

Dr Mahathir was commenting on talk that the Government was planning to review the Act in the coming Parliament meeting in view of the controversy surrounding land acquisition for development projects in recent months.

The Prime Minister was speaking to reporters after a special meeting with teachers and heads of departments serving in Baling district. The function was held at Sekolah Menengah Siong here.

"We have no plans (to table the amendments at the coming meeting)... but there are certain weaknesses in the Act that need to be reviewed," said Dr Mahathir, adding that the Government had identified the weaknesses in the Act.

Asked whether he could elaborate on the weaknesses, Dr Mahathir said this was not possible because the matter was being closely studied.

Asked whether a deadline was given for the review, he said that no time frame was given but the study to rectify the weaknesses was already underway.

He added that a timetable had not been fixed for the amendment of the Act.

"(It will be made) in the next sitting of the Parliament... maybe not this sitting because the time is too short," he said.

The manner in which some land had been acquired from individual owners under the Act had triggered strong criticisms from the affected parties.

Since the Act was amended in 1991, the authorities, especially certain State Governments, had been strongly criticised for using the Act to acquire land for development purposes.

Most landowners affected by the acquisition regarded the Act as denying their

rights to land ownership.

Among the most controversial land acquisition cases were the acquisition of 250ha of land by the Kedah State Government for the setting of the State's first integrated prawn farming project in Kerpan.

In Malacca, a small group of landowners vehemently protested the acquisition of their land for the setting up of a Petronas refinery.

These acquisitions had led to the issues being politicised by opposition parties for political mileage.

Dr Mahathir was also asked to comment on International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz's comments on Financial Adviser to the Government Tun Daim Zainuddin.

Daim had earlier commented in the Hong Kong-based magazine *Asiaweek* on Rafidah's position in the allocation of shares to her son-in-law.

In the interview, Daim, among others, touched on the Bumiputera share issue.

Daim also talked about the Government policy of preferential share allocation to Bumiputeras as well as the Anti-Corruption Agency's investigation into the award of 1.5 million Leader Universal Holdings Berhad's shares to Rafidah's son-in-law Fazrin Azwar.

Rafidah said Daim's statement could be used by the Opposition against the Government.

Dr Mahathir said: "It is nothing... it is just differences in opinion.

"Differences of opinion among leaders could occur anywhere, even among leaders of the country. The differences in opinion will not affect the party and Government," he said, adding that Rafidah had spoken to him on the matter.

On a memorandum submitted by teachers to the Prime Minister requesting the Government to upgrade teachers' welfare, Dr Mahathir confirmed receiving it.

However, he said, it was still being studied and the Government needed more time to scrutinise the memorandum.

"We are responsible to every quarter in the country.

Authorities need time to study teachers' memo

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"We are not only responsible to one party.

"Therefore we have to be careful when making decisions. We have to properly study the matter because it also involves other quarters.

"If we entertain only one quarter, other problems may crop up because others may also want to stake their claims," he added.

When asked to elaborate on the Kampung Lalang new township which he launched earlier, Dr Mahathir said he was impressed with the remarkable pace of development.

"The landscaping is remarkably good, there are more brick houses, schools and other facilities," he said.

On academic achievement among pupils in Baling, Dr Mahathir said efforts were being intensified to improve the pupils' academic performance.

Asked to elaborate on his call at his meeting with the teachers for the people to acquire skills, Dr Mahathir said the people could choose the fields of their interest.

"If we want to acquire hi-tech knowledge, we can do it. Skills and knowledge do not belong to one particular group of people. We too can master it," he added.

Dr Mahathir was also

asked to comment on talk that a tussle for seats among Barisan Nasional component parties was the reason for the delay in calling for the general election.

Dr Mahathir said it was the liberty of anyone to have such a perception.

"You can think whatever you want, I don't care what they think. Whether it is

earlier or later, it is our choice.

"If we are given five years, why must we do it after three or 3½ years?" he asked.