

28/10/1998

PM dismisses allegation police provocation brought on violence

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today dismissed allegations that police had provoked demonstrators in Kampung Baru last Saturday.

He pointed to the fact that the demonstrators had brought with them petrol, molotov cocktails, stones and sharp objects to Kampung Baru.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Home Minister, was asked to comment on allegations of police using excessive force against the demonstrators, some of whom turned violent.

Two policemen were injured after being attacked by the demonstrators who also stoned a passing police patrol car. Some were said to have started a bonfire in Jalan Raja Abdullah.

Dr Mahathir said that even if the police had provoked them, the demonstrators could not justify having the objects with them.

"Obviously they wanted to be provoked so that they can have an excuse. If it is just police provocation, then they would have come without any little things...sharp objects and carrying stones in their jackets," he said in reply to questions at a Press conference after opening the Heli-Asia '98 exhibition at the Mines international exhibition and convention centre in Sungai Besi here.

Dr Mahathir said the police had not used excessive force but had used water cannon "just to wet them a little bit and dampen their spirit, that's about all."

"The police have not beaten up these people as claimed by the wife of the ex-Deputy Prime Minister," he said in reference to claims by Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, who said that the violent demonstration was a result of police provocation.

On claims that the cans of petrol, molotov cocktails and sharp objects were planted at the site, Dr Mahathir said that that was "one excuse" that these demonstrators would always give.

"If that is so, then the demonstration is not genuine. It is actually organised by police and made up of policemen. So who is supporting the reformasi if it's policemen who were having the demonstration?"

Asked whether he expected the situation to get nastier, Dr Mahathir said as a rule, demonstrations often began peacefully but when they did not get any response or when they did not achieve their objective, they would normally start becoming violent.

"That is why demonstrations have to be stopped early before they get to the stage where people get burnt and killed. Already they (demonstrators) are asking people to bring kerosene, petrol. Sometimes they think of bringing molotov cocktail."

Dr Mahathir said it was not "a Malaysian thing" to have violent demonstrations but felt that "these people" have been "inspired by other countries to change the character of Malaysia, the traditions of Malaysia in order to achieve their own objective."

Asked if the police would be cracking down on demonstrations, he said: "I don't know what you mean by cracking down. Do we beat them on the head or something like that? We don't have any intention of doing that. I think the police have no intention of beating up people."

On calls by Kampung Baru residents that police act more firmly against such demonstrations, Dr Mahathir said acting firmly did not mean "beating up people".

Dr Mahathir said people such as businessmen including small-time traders were beginning to feel the effect of such demonstrations.

He said this was because demonstrators fleeing police arrest would run into their shops and start throwing chairs.

"So people would have to pay the price unless of course you support some kind of police action."

Dr Mahathir was also asked on the statement yesterday by acting Umno Youth leader Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein that the movement had reason to believe that several expelled Umno members were plotting to prevent Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's trial from taking place on Nov 2.

Hishammuddin had said that this group met on Batam island in Indonesia recently to map out their tactics.

Dr Mahathir said that Hishammuddin must have had evidence of this.

"Obviously the demonstration (on Saturday) was a duplication of the one in Indonesia. Of course they would like it to be more violent as in Indonesia.

"And they want it to be continuous so that the Government will be toppled. And the most important thing is that if the Government is toppled there would be no trial for the ex-DPM. Then of course, he will get away scot-free."

Asked for details on his meeting last night with Menteri Besar, the Prime Minister said it was "just an exchange of information about what was happening on the ground."

On an accusation by certain people that he was "trying to sell out the Malays", he said he would leave it to the people to make their judgement.

Asked if this accusation was racial, he said: "They are trying to make it racial. Of course they don't like this idea of a peaceful Malaysia. We have a good image so they want to destroy that image to show that we do not know how to govern ourselves."

(END)