

Mahathir links clashes to squatter woes

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KUALA LUMPUR Fri The government will take action to overcome the squatter problem throughout the country to prevent recurrences of the clashes in several settlements off Old Klang Road here since March 8

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said that the clashes were not merely a racial matter but are rooted in the social economic origins of the people there

Poor people are easily stirred to violence he told about 1 200 people at the Malaysia Hindu Sangam 36th annual dinner at Menara PGRM here tonight

Mahathir said that although the income of people in the city may be high the equally high cost of living has resulted in many city residents remaining poor

We have become lulled by the low poverty figures (based on income earned) that is reported in the country without realising the actual situation he said

He said the clashes in Kampung Medan were due to minor misunderstandings but other parties tried to exploit the residents there for their own gains

We are told that there were others who became involved later those who were not even anywhere near the scene when the first quarrel started Mahathir said

Earlier today Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the situation in the settlements is under police control and does not warrant a curfew Abdullah said several recent inci-

dents of individuals slashed by pang rang wielding people was a continuation of the gang fights

The situation only requires closer monitoring by police I don't think there is a need for a curfew because it will only make life even more difficult for the residents there Abdullah told a news conference after opening the Optimax Laser Eye Centre

He denied allegations that the most recent incidents of slashing happened because police had reduced their presence in the areas

He said those who witness any attack incident should help police

We want the public to feel secure even at midnight or early in the morning Abdullah said

Inspector General of Police Tan Sri Norian Mai called on all communities in the Old Klang Road settlements to play their role in ensuring that the situation continues to improve

Police will continue to station about 1 000 personnel in the settlements

I seek the cooperation of both the Malay and Indian communities there to help ensure that the situation returns to what it was before Norian said after attending tahlil prayers at the Bukit Aman mosque last night in conjunction with the 194th Police Day which falls on Sunday

Norian said security will be stepped up in the areas

He added that cooperation from members of the public is important in curbing such incidents