

PM defends ISA arrests

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'Govt places importance on rights of majority'

KUALA LUMPUR: The arrest of seven people under the Internal Security Act is to protect the rights of the majority to peace and stability, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

The Government, he said, placed more importance on the rights of the majority, and not on a small number of people who had their own agenda.

"We prioritise the rights of the majority to trade and live in a stable environment without pressure or riots ... These are human rights, too.

"We cannot equate these with the rights of a small group which has specific interests which block the rights of others," he told reporters after launching a locally-developed dental filling Silverfil yesterday.

Dr Mahathir stressed that the ISA detentions were a preventive measure to protect the people from violence and damage to their property during the opposition's proposed gathering tomorrow.

The police, he said, had said that they had evidence of a plan to use explosives during the gathering.

"The police have decided that they are not going to deal with the demonstration as this can bring about violence and we do not know what kind of damage it can cause," he said.

On the possibility of international backlash resulting from the latest arrests, Dr Mahathir said: "As usual, the foreign media will question us ... They have never seen anything good in us even if we are nice. We have a

duty to our country ... They can go and fry their faces."

Police detained the seven *reformasi* activists, mostly Parti Keadilan Nasional leaders, under the ISA on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Police said they were part of a group of about 20 activists who held

meetings between Jan 6 and April 4, planning ways to influence the people to participate in street demonstrations.

One of the main aims of the group was to hold a massive demonstration known as "Black 14" in the city tomorrow.

Asked why the seven were not detained under other laws, the Prime Minister said normal laws required certain evidence, procedures and processes which, from the point of view of the police, were not effective in preventing something bad from happening.