

Law to protect witnesses

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PM: Crooks go free
as public are afraid
to help police

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SHAH ALAM, Mon: The government is prepared to consider introducing a law to protect witnesses to crimes so that they will not fear coming forward to help police investigations.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today it is time to introduce laws to protect the witnesses as many of them were threatened or fear to come forward, thus, resulting in many criminals going free.

"One of the things we should have is to protect witnesses from being threatened. I think witnesses can be protected which is something the government can consider," he told reporters after opening a conference of police commissioners, chief police officers, commanders and commandants here.

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Also present were Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who is Home Minister, Home Ministry secretary-general Datuk Aseh Che Mat and Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Norian Mai.

Mahathir expressed regret over the attitude of some members of the public who chose not to be involved in helping the authorities in the investigations of criminal cases.

The special law was one of the suggestions put forward during the dialogue between Mahathir and the senior police officers who also expressed a need for a multiracial force.

Welcoming the prime minister's statement, Norian said such a law

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will widen the scope of the protection provided by police. Under existing laws, limited protection is extended to witnesses, he said.

Mahathir also touched on the need to review deterrent laws such as the Printing Presses and Publications Act (PPPA) to make them more relevant and effective in the age of information technology.

The widespread use of the Internet and the threat of abuse in spreading information may require amendments to acts or new ones.

He said: "Specifically at present, PPPA is unable to tackle the spread of information that is harmful while the sources are also hard to trace.

"Many of these acts contain penalties that are not commensurate with the crimes committed and are not effective as deterrent ... we must find ways to make the laws relevant again."

Mahathir said any change to the PPPA would not point towards unlimited press freedom. "We don't want to be like the press in other countries, the so-called liberal countries, who tells lies, fabricates stories and provokes people."

He said the foreign media, made up their stories based on insufficient facts and only limited sources.