

Furore over UM blaze

SUN 30 JUN 2001

By Vinod Divakaran
and Regina William

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri: Fire gutted the historic **Dewan** Tunku Canselor at the Universiti Malaya campus on the eve of a symposium to be attended by the prime minister and several government leaders, sparking charges of sabotage.

The early morning blaze destroyed 80% of the huge hall used for UM's convocations, furniture, sound systems and about 1,800 graduands' robes and 2,000 mortar boards. Damage is estimated at RM12.4 million (see Page 3).

Although investigations have yet to be completed, former Umno Youth leader and chairman of the Foundation of The Movers of The Vision (*Yayasan Penggerak Wuwasan*) Tan Sri Dr Rahim Tamby Chik claimed the fire was most likely caused by anti-government elements from within and outside UM.

Puteri Umno pro tern chief Azalina Othman Said, meanwhile, called for the resignation of UM vice-chancellor Prof Datuk Dr Anuar Zaini Md Zain for failing to maintain order in the campus.

Said Rahim: "We suspect that the fire was a sabotage involving a conspiracy to ensure the failure of this weekends symposium when Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and several other government leaders are expected to attend."

Mahathir, who was on an official visit to Penang, said: "We don't want to point fingers at anyone. We will investigate."

When asked about the blaze and the trend towards militancy in universities, he said: "This trend is there. Many go there not to study but to take part in issues unrelated to studies."

"If this is true, we must review the allocation for the university"

The government, he said, spends more than 10 times the amount a student pays as fees.

"Majority of the bumiputra students

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**Attack was
planned,
claims
Rahim**

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receive scholarships and grants. If they are not interested (in studies), it is pointless to spend money. We can give the places to others," he said.

The suspected arson attack, Rahim told a press conference at the university this afternoon, appeared to have been planned as pamphlets protesting the participation of government leaders had been circulated in the campus yesterday evening.

The pamphlets also called on students to prevent the two-day symposium which starts tomorrow from taking place.

"The pamphlets were the most threatening to date and we have reason to believe that the fire was caused by the very same people behind these publications."

Azalina, in a memorandum which was handed over to Anuar after the press conference, said that he should take responsibility for the incidents and step down.

She said that apart from the fire, Anuar had also allowed the circulation of the anti-government magazine, *Penerbitan Varsiti* 2001, last month and the distribution of anti-government pamphlets last night.

"His credibility has come under question as a result of these incidents," said Azalina who is also a former UM student.

She said that if the university's security personnel were doing their job, the fire would not have happened.

"The fire certainly seems related to the prime minister's visit this weekend," she added.

On the demand for Anuar's resignation, Mahathir said: "We can't blame the VC. We can't make irrational accusations at anyone."