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Mahathir-DTC

NO CONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE YET ON DEWAN TUNKU CANSELOR FIRE, SAYS DR M

PUTRAJAYA, July 14 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today investigations into the June 29 Dewan Tunku Canselor fire at Universiti Malaya (UM) have not found conclusive evidence into the cause of the blaze but the possibility of arson cannot be ruled out yet.

The prime minister said he had received a report on the investigations carried out by the Fire and Rescue Department, the police and the Chemistry Department but all the three agencies could not ascertain the actual cause of the pre-dawn fire which caused an estimated damage of RM12.4 million.

"They cannot come to an agreement on the real cause of the fire although there are signs pointing to electrical problems, maybe there was a short-circuit but it is not clear," he told reporters after chairing the Third Pre-Budget Dialogue 2002 at the Prime Minister's Department here.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Finance Minister, was asked to comment on the investigations report by the authorities into the fire which destroyed the 37-year-old landmark building opened by the country's first Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj in 1966.

UM Vice-Chancellor Prof Datuk Dr Anuar Zaini Mohamed Zain had said that arson cannot be ruled out as the probable cause.

Dr Anuar Zaini had said that arson cannot be ruled out as pamphlets had been distributed, including messages posted through the Internet urging students to boycott certain leaders coming to the country's premier university.

Asked whether the element of arson was mentioned in the report, Dr Mahathir said: "They cannot determine clearly whether arson had been committed. Nevertheless, we cannot dismiss the possibility."

Meanwhile, Dr Anuar Zaini said today the cause of the fire would be announced only after the official investigation report had been received.

"I have not received the report yet and I don't want to comment on it. When I receive the official report, I will call you all (media)," he told reporters after presenting diplomas to 394 graduands from the university's Medical Faculty.

Meanwhile, the Fire and Rescue Department, in a statement today, said it had never made any statement on the findings of the fire incident to the media.

Its Public Relations Unit Head Norizan Sulaiman said media speculations on the fire incident had attributed the source of their news to the department.

He said the department had completed its investigation report on the fire and had handed it to Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting and the police.

With regard to the Dewan Tunku Canselor Fire, he said the department acted under Section 5(1)(b) of the Fire Services Act 1988 to conduct investigations into the cause of the fire.

He urged the media to refrain from speculating on the incident.

-- BERNAMA

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