

# Public whipping 'if people want it'

By SA'ODAH ELIAS

SEPANG: The government will consider introducing public whipping for those convicted of incest if it receives full mandate from the people, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

"We have never had public whippings before but if the people want it and give the government the

mandate to carry it out, we may do it because there are too many shameless people in our society," he told reporters upon his arrival at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport after a week-long official visit to Morocco, Libya and Bahrain.

Dr Mahathir said the government was willing to consider this drastic measure because those who

were involved in such activities were brazen.

However, he said, while the government acknowledged the need for stiffer penalties for the offence, it was more concerned with the moral degradation among the people, especially Muslims.

"We can introduce stiffer laws to curb this problem, but I believe

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that if we cannot build up the moral resistance towards this despicable act and inculcate positive values among our people, it will not help much.

"Look at our law on drugs. We have provisions on death sentence but the drug problem still persists in the country. So I think legislation alone will not be able to arrest this problem unless we address the problem of moral degradation," he added.

The proposal for whipping for those convicted for incest was made by the Legal Co-ordination Committee in the Prime Minister's Department and Attorney-General's Chambers recently.

Asked if the Government would also impose stiffer penalties on those involved in peddling pornographic materials which had been attributed to the increase in the number of incest cases, Dr Mahathir said:

"Fortifying the people against negative influences through effective teaching of the religion will be more effective because with the advent of the Internet, no effective law can be introduced to prevent the people from accessing pornographic materials."

Society, he said, was getting more shameless by day and most had no qualms about getting involved in criminal activities so long as they got what they wanted.

Dr Mahathir also attributed the increase in incest cases to the ineffective ways of teaching the religion in the country.

The Government, he said, had provided all the necessary facilities for religious education, but such classes were sometimes misused to spread political ideology.

"We provide the facilities for them to study religion, but most of the time, instead of learning about moral values, the focus will be on politics."

In a statement, DAP vice-chairman Karpal Singh said the Government should not impose public whipping on those found guilty of incest.

He said while the Government's concern for introducing harsher penalties for the offence was understandable, public whipping would be incongruous with the rule of law.

"Public whipping will bring the country into international revulsion," he said in a statement.

Karpal Singh said no Commonwealth country or a developed country provided for public whipping, which is a step away from public executions.

The Bar Council, in a separate statement, supported the approach taken by Attorney-General Datuk Abdul Gani Patail in directing the prosecutors to push for heavier sentence for rape and incest, including consecutive jail terms.

Its chairman Mah Weng Kwai said the Bar Council advocated that judges be given the liberty to decide on consecutive sentences where the seriousness of the offences demanded as opposed to being forced a blanket mandatory sentence in all cases.