

04/10/2002

PM: No protection for the guilty (HL)

Ramlan Said, Hamidah Atan; A. Hafiz Yatim

MALACCA, Thurs. - The Government will not stop enforcement agencies from prosecuting any individual with ill-gotten gains stashed in bank accounts in Switzerland, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

In giving the assurance to the people, the Prime Minister said anyone found guilty would not be protected as the Government did not fear such disclosures would affect its integrity as claimed by some quarters.

"We are not afraid ... whoever these accounts belong to, if it can be proven, go ahead," he said when asked about the possibility of the Anti-Corruption Agency investigating other accounts in Switzerland held by Malaysians, besides the one involving Perwaja Steel.

He said this at a Press conference after opening the third Malay and Islamic World Convention at the Riviera Bay Resort.

Dr Mahathir said the Government's aim in investigating ill-gotten monies was not political.

"We are not investigating to expose. We are looking for cases. If there is enough evidence, then the matter will be brought to court where it would eventually be exposed.

"We are investigating not to find information so that we can later say this person or that person is bad ...that's not our aim."

On investigations into Perwaja Steel, Dr Mahathir said it was still being looked into by the ACA.

"I have not received the latest information. I do not know the findings made so far but the agency said contacts have been made with the Swiss authorities.

"But the agency is not required to report to me," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Government would not stop the ACA from acting against guilty parties involved in the case.

Dr Mahathir was also asked whether he was satisfied with the expression of regret by the United States embassy in Kuala Lumpur over the inappropriate treatment experienced by him and Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi during their visits to the US.

"Yes, it is sufficient for me. I did not raise the incident until it happened to Abdullah. My visit to the US was quite some time back but when the same thing happened to Abdullah, I felt it was not a healthy trend.

"They lack respect for other people. It is absurd to think that I will smuggle explosives on board a Government plane."

Newspapers yesterday quoted Dr Mahathir as saying that US immigration officers were rude and rough towards him when they boarded the Malaysian executive jet while he was in New York.

Dr Mahathir said the Government would not lodge any protest over the incidents, saying the US had the right to implement measures it deemed fit.

On the possibility of Muslim leaders and the Organisation of Islamic Conference meeting President George W. Bush to discuss the poor treatment received by Muslims after the Sept 11 attacks, Dr Mahathir said there was no need for it.

"I am of the opinion that when people who are weak meet others who are stronger, the former can only express their views and it is up to the stronger party whether to listen or not. We (Muslim leaders) have said our mind on this. All Islamic countries oppose the way Muslims are being treated."

The Prime Minister was also asked to confirm a statement by Education Minister Tan Sri Musa Mohamad on Tuesday that the move to teach Mathematics and Science in English would start next year.

"The Government has not made any final decision yet."

But when pointed out that Musa's statement indicated a final decision had already been made, Dr Mahathir replied: "It seems so from what he said ...the ability of the ministry (to implement)."

On whether some types of schools would be exempted, he said the Cabinet would discuss the matter as the implementation would involve all types of schools.

Pressed on when this would be made, he replied: "This is not a simple matter as we are doing something major. If we do not make enough preparations, we do not assess our ability, perhaps we will be making a decision not beneficial for students."

Dr Mahathir agreed that the Government had not much time as the new school term next year was only three months away.

He said there were problems in implementing the move, with mixed reaction from parents and teachers, while others like language champions and political parties were raising issues related to culture, race and language.