

29/04/2003

Perwaja probe more than `50pc complete'

reports on "Dewan Negara" by M.K. Megan
THE investigation into the Perwaja Steel scandal is more than "50 per cent complete", Finance Ministry Parliamentary Secretary Hashim Ismail said yesterday.

The delay, he said, was due to the reluctance of financial institutions from other countries to co-operate as they wanted to safeguard the confidentiality of their clients.

"A Swiss bank had, however, agreed to relax its ruling after Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad visited Switzerland in June last year," said Hashim when winding up the Supplementary Supply Bill (2002) 2003.

Swiss President Kasper Villinger had agreed to provide access to Perwaja Steel's financial information with the bank.

Hashim said banks from countries like Japan and Hong Kong were also involved.

"The Government did not want the investigation and charges to be vague," he said at the Parliament lobby.

Another issue which saw heated debate was the status of Malaysia as an Islamic State. The argument started when Siti Zailah Mohd Yusoff from Kelantan questioned the recognition given to Malaysia as an Islamic State as it has yet to implement Syariah criminal laws.

Siti Zailah also said taxes collected from gaming outlets were not separated from other proceeds of the Government, as well as from funds used for Islamic education.

Hashim said Malaysia had been recognised as an Islamic State by ulama and intellectuals, including the Rector of the Al Azhar University in Egypt.

He said the proceeds from gaming and gambling outlets were less than four per cent of the nation's total income, and the Government had stopped issuing new gaming licences.