

Dr M told not to pass the buck to cops
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DAP stalwart Lim Kit Siang furiously denied today that then-prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad ever met with him to assure him that he would not be arrested before his detention under Operasi Lalang in 1987.

In fact, Lim (right) said, more than a year after he had been incarcerated at the Kamunting detention camp in Perak, Mahathir had gone on to say that his arrest under the Internal Security Act was justified.

"I never met Mahathir and he never gave me any assurance that I would not be arrested before the launch of Operasi Lalang on Oct 27, 1987... let Mahathir name the opposition leaders he had met!" he said.

In the latest book on Mahathir by American journalist Tom Plate, the former premier was quoted as saying that he had actually met with opposition leaders to guarantee them they would not be prosecuted.

'Police insisted on arrests'

He told Plate that he had actually preferred to "handle it differently", but that the police had insisted on the arrests.

In his statement today, Lim pointed out to another interview given by Mahathir, in November 1988, in which the nation's longest serving prime minister had said that several opposition leaders were still under detention because "they refuse to give up stirring racial hatred".

In the interview with Asiaweek, Mahathir said that Lim would be detained until he "came around to thinking it is not the right thing to do". The veteran opposition leader was released from Kamunting in April 1989.

Also detained then were current Bukit Gelugor MP Karpal Singh, Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng who was then the MP for Kota Melaka, Kepong MP Tan Seng Giaw, the late P Pato, the late V David and Lau Dak Kee.

As proof of Mahathir's "personal, petty and vindictive" nature, Lim and his son Guan Eng were the last of the 49 Operasi Lalang detainees interned in Kamunting to be released.

While he conceded that there were racial tensions in October 1987, Lim said this was in no way the doing of DAP MPs or others detained under the crackdown.

'Stop passing the buck and apologise'

A day before his arrest, the DAP supremo had spoken in Parliament, during the 1988 budget sitting, calling on political parties to agree to a refrain from raising racial, language, cultural or religious issues in a "one-year moratorium".

"(It was) solely the deliberate and irresponsible creation of power-seekers in Umno, at a

time when there was general insecurity at all levels of Umno leadership because of (the party) being split into two factions, one led by Mahathir the other by Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah and Musa Hitam," he said.

A government White Paper issued in March 1988 referred to the Umno Youth rally on Oct 17, 1987, displaying slogans such as "Soak it (the keris) with Chinese blood" involving current Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak.

"Mahathir cannot shirk responsibility by passing the buck to the police. He must come clean and apologise to the nation for masterminding Ops Lalang, the darkest chapter of human rights in Malaysia.

"Or is Mahathir going to blame the judiciary, police, the Election Commission, the Anti-Corruption Agency, the media and the key national institutions for their failure to stand up to oppose him during his premiership?" Lim asked.

Former IGP Hanif should clear the air

Going one step further, constitutional lawyer Abdul Aziz Bari said that it was actually illegal for Mahathir to blame the police as the buck stops with the government of the day.

Constitutionally, Abdul Aziz (right) said, the police as part of public service carried out the government's instructions, as long as this was in line with the law.

Detentions under the Internal Security Act fall under the jurisdiction of the home minister, a post Mahathir held in 1987.

"But whatever it is, the assertions... raise another important issue - that the operation was unconstitutional and thus the detainees have the right to get compensation... (which) Mahathir obviously forgot.

"So, it is now up to the (then police chief) Hanif Omar to clarify as he has obviously been blamed by Mahathir, though legally it is wrong for Mahathir to do that," he said, adding that there are moral grounds for an explanation.