

**Former IGP backs up Mahathir's story**  
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Former inspector-general of police Mohammed Hanif Omar has jumped to the defence of Dr Mahathir Mohamad, denying that the former premier had ordered the mass detention of political dissidents under Ops Lalang in 1987.

Hanif, who was the IGP from 1974 to 1994, said that Mahathir was opposed to the arrests.

"You can't blame him. He is right. As a matter of fact, it was entirely the police's decision. It was not his (Mahathir's) decision. Mahathir was actually opposed to it... He was against Ops Lalang," said Hanif. In a brief telephone conversation with Malaysiakini, Hanif added that the police were entirely responsible for the operation.

"It was not (Mahathir's) role nor was it his power. We were the ones responsible for it," he added.

In the 1987 crackdown on Oct 27, 106 people - mostly opposition and a handful of MCA and Umno politicians - were arrested under the Internal Security Act while the publishing permits for The Star and Sin Chew Jit Poh and Watan were revoked.

In a recently released book, 'Doctor M: Operation Malaysia - Conversations with Mahathir Mohamad', the former premier tells interviewer and veteran American journalist Tom Plate that the arrests were the decision of the police, and that there was nothing he could do to stop it.

"Well, I would have handled it differently, except that the police wanted to do these things because they say it is necessary," Mahathir was reported to have said.

**Dr M's responsibility to sign detention orders**

However, Hanif added that it was Mahathir's responsibility as the home minister to sign the detention orders once the first 60-day detention provided for under the Internal Security Act expired.

It is up to him to decide from then on," said Hanif. Mahathir was the home minister from 1986 to 1999.

Under the ISA, the police may detain a person for up to 60 days without trial. Beyond that, one may be further detained for a period of two years - and this can be extended indefinitely - on orders from the home minister.

While most of the detainees in the Ops Lalang were released either conditionally or unconditionally, 40 were issued two-year detention orders, including then DAP secretary-general Lim Kit Siang and party deputy chairman Karpal Singh.

Hanif also denied that the crackdown was politically motivated or that the police were driven by political pressure.

"The police force do not go by political persuasion," he said. He also recalled that he met with the former PM before the crackdown together with the then-Special Branch director

Abdul Rahim Noor to brief Mahathir on the growing political tensions.

The government had explained that the second largest ISA swoop since the May 13 racial riots were 'necessary' to contain rising 'racial tensions' from the protests over the appointment of non-Chinese educated principals to Chinese vernacular schools.

In response, Umno held a counter protest, where notably then-Youth chief Najib Abdul Razak led a mammoth rally in Kampung Baru days prior to the arrests.

"(Mahathir) opposed this (the ISA arrests). But the police will do what we have to do," said Hanif.

"(The police force) were independent, at least during my time."

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