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CIA REPORT

Dr M's claim ludicrous, says Salleh

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KUALA LUMPUR: It is ridiculous for Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad to claim that a recently released United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) report, linking him to a scandal in 1983, was meant to demonise him.

Communications and Multimedia Minister Datuk Seri Salleh Said Keruak, on his blog yesterday, said the report on the Bumiputera Malaysia Finance Limited (BMF) scandal was just two pages out of 13 million that were declassified by the CIA.

"The CIA did not declassify just these two pages regarding the BMF issue," said Salleh, adding that it was purely coincidental.

"If it was true, why did the CIA wait 34 years to do this?"

"They would have done it when he (Dr Mahathir) was still prime minister, and not now, when he is no longer important to the US," he said regarding the claim by Dr Mahathir, who also said the CIA had done so because he had criticised the US.

Salleh said many countries declassified documents that had been clas-

sified or under the Official Secrets Act after some time, depending on their sensitivity, while some documents remained classified forever.

"But for Dr Mahathir to suggest that the CIA had declassified 13 million pages of documents just so that they could leak two pages related to BMF, aimed at demonising him, is ludicrous."

Dr Mahathir claimed that the timing of the release was politically motivated.

Gerakan vice-president Datuk Dr Dominic Lau said if the CIA report was true, Malaysians could now see Dr Mahathir's true colours.

He said while Dr Mahathir had contributed to the nation's development, the costs and sacrifices involved were high as nepotism, abuse and corruption had allegedly taken place during his administration.

"Based on what has been reported, the people have a valid reason to worry that there had been an intended cover-up and lack of corrective action.

"We may now think that Dr Mahathir, too, has skeletons in his closet, and he has lost his moral right to criticise others," Lau told the *New Straits Times*.

"We need clarity on the issue as it is a matter of public concern.

"The authorities may need to consider reopening an investigation into the BMF scandal, and brief the public and take the necessary action."

The report, released online by the US intelligence agency last week, summarised that Dr Mahathir's position as prime minister then was at risk due to the graft scandal.

It said while there were no direct links established between Dr Mahathir and the BMF graft, the CIA believed that the "hint of association" had damaged the political standing of Dr Mahathir's administration, which was elected in 1981 "under a banner of clean government".

The government's image was also tarnished, it said, as the scandal involved the financial arm of the New Economic Policy.