

'Be clear on what insult means'

If it's factual, no punishment is needed, says PM

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PUTRAJAYA: Malaysia must have a clear definition on what statements or actions are deemed insulting to the royal institution, said Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The Prime Minister said if a comment made by an individual is factual, the person should not be punished for the statement as it goes against the spirit of free speech.

"At the moment, our enforcement officers do not understand what is considered an insult. So we need to spell out what sort of actions or words can be construed as insults.

"I have said before that Malaysia

now practises freedom of speech.

"With this freedom of speech, if you say something factual, you cannot be punished for it.

"But on the other hand, if we shut the mouths of everyone, to the point that people cannot even speak up against acts of crime, then there will be injustice in the country," said Dr Mahathir at a press conference here.

He was speaking after chairing the sixth meeting of the Special Cabinet Committee on Anti-Corruption.

The Prime Minister was asked to

comment on the arrests of three individuals for insulting Sultan Muhammad V, who had stepped down as the Yang di-Pertuan Agong.

The police arrested two men aged 27 and 46 and a woman aged 26 under the Sedition Act over comments they made on Facebook and Twitter.

The arrests had drawn criticism from several quarters in the public, who felt it contradicted Pakatan Harapan's promise to abolish the Sedition Act.

Meanwhile, Dr Mahathir said the government would abide by its

stance not to allow Israeli athletes to compete in the World Para Swimming Championship 2019, which will be held in Kuching this July.

Malaysia does not have diplomatic ties with Israel.

"We will not allow it. If they (Israeli athletes) still come over, it will be an offence. If they want to take away the competition from us, they can take away," said Dr Mahathir.

The championships in Kuching will determine qualification for the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games.