

**Dr M backs RCI to probe Lahad Datu 'mastermind'**  
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**By Syed Jaymal Zahiid**

KUALA LUMPUR, March 15 — Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad today backed suggestions to set up a royal commission of inquiry (RCI) to dissect the motive behind the Sulu incursion including allegations of third-party involvement.

"Yes, a RCI could help unravel things; I'm sure the public wants to know about what is going on," the former prime minister told reporters after donating to the police welfare fund for the families of the eight officers killed in the Sabah conflict.

Home Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein had said yesterday that thorough investigations needed to be done to find out the real motive for the intrusion, including if there were any parties that underwrote the terrorists from the southern Philippines to undermine the country's stability and sovereignty.

"This can be done either by an RCI or opening a White Paper. I myself want to know who are the masterminds and who are funding the terrorists and did the planning because all these concern national security," national news agency Bernama quoted him as saying.

Earlier today, Dr Mahathir said the Sulu incursion of Sabah was likely funded by "someone" as the Sulu Sultanate was known to be poor, amid allegations that Malaysian politicians are behind the conflict.

The former prime minister said although claims of "third-party" involvement were still under police investigation, he believed the Sulu Sultanate had received financial assistance. He, however, refused to say if the Malaysian opposition was involved.

Citing a media report from the Philippines, leaders from the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition have alleged that Opposition Leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim had instigated the Sulu incursion.

The Umno-owned Utusan Malaysia and TV3 had picked up a news report from the Philippine Daily Inquirer two weeks ago, citing an allegation that an unnamed individual allied to Anwar had given the opposition's support to the Sulu rebels' claim on Sabah.

Utusan also cited a February 14 report from newswire Reuters, in which an anonymous Philippine military officer reportedly said a Malaysian opposition politician had invited the Sulu men to discuss land matters.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak immediately ordered an investigation on the matter.

Anwar has denied the allegations. The PKR de facto leader claimed the accusations were meant to divert public attention from Putrajaya's weak handling of the situation.

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