

No watchdog role for Election Watch: Dr M

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THE Government will not allow Election Watch to play the role of a watchdog on foreign observers invited to witness the forthcoming general election, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

He said the observers will have access to all facilities in the course of their work, but their operations will be confined to the forthcoming general election and not on any previous polls.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir conveyed these points to Opposition Leader Lim Kit Siang when the DAP secretary general met the Prime Minister at his office on Monday. Mr Lim had requested a meeting with Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir to discuss certain aspects of the role of the observers in the election.

Speaking to reporters after a one-day visit to Malacca yesterday, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said Mr Lim had made certain requests on the role of the observers.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir told Mr Lim that the observers were unnecessary but certain internal developments had prompted the Government to make an official request to the Commonwealth Secretariat in London for their presence in Malaysia.

At Monday's meeting, Mr Lim proposed several conditions to the Government, but the Government would not agree to them, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said without giving details of what these conditions were.

"But the observers will learn that the same campaign restrictions apply to all the political par-

ties participating in the general election," he said.

The Prime Minister said members of Election Watch, an interest group recently formed to supposedly monitor the coming election, have been busy abroad bad-mouthing the Government.

He said this was possibly done as "an act of revenge" because one of its members was removed from Government service.

"Against this background, I doubt if Election Watch has the right credentials to be observers to our election," Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said.

The Prime Minister said the Commonwealth observers, will be confined to witnessing the polls and will not be allowed to have direct involvement in local politics.

For instance, they will not be allowed to hear presentations from political parties or receive memorandums from them, especially when the documents or presentations are made with the intention of undermining the Government.

However, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir did agree with Mr Lim on one of his many requests. The Prime Minister said members of the team will be drawn from countries practising the same system of parliamentary democracy and using a multi-party system of election.

The Prime Minister also agreed with Mr Lim that the election will be "fair, free, clean and honest". Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said this is nothing new to the Government because it had been "fair, free, clean and honest" in eight previous elections. — NST