

Dr M: Election Watch has interfered

Re-think on polls observers

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By AHMAD A. TALIB

MUAR, Sat. — The Government is having second thoughts about inviting the Commonwealth Secretariat to send observers to witness the coming general election, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said the Government believed that Election Watch, headed by former Lord President Tun Mohammed Suffian Hashim, had influenced Commonwealth Secretary-General Chief Emeka Anyaoku, to send two representatives to Malaysia this week.

Dr Mahathir said the officials, who were still in the country, had not been invited by the Government, adding that the Government could not have invited them as it had yet to finalise details concerning the invitation to the Commonwealth to send an observer team.

He had announced in the Dewan Rakyat on June 21 that the Cabinet had agreed to allow a team of observers to observe the election.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir told a public gathering at the hockey ground here that the Government was disappointed that Election Watch had got in touch with the Commonwealth Secretariat.

He told the Press that Election Watch had written to him saying that it had been in touch with the Commonwealth Secretariat in London.

"The Commonwealth Secretariat had responded by sending the two officials, and I believe that they have taken sides in favour of Election Watch.

"The Government had not officially agreed to a team from the Commonwealth because it is still discussing the terms of reference governing their activities in Malaysia.

"I have had talks with the Opposition, including DAP secretary-general Lim Kit Siang, to get their agreement.

"But the Commonwealth Secretary-General had pre-empted us by directing the two officials to meet Election Watch.

"This is what the Government had wanted to avoid because we are convinced that Election Watch is one-sided."

Asked what he planned to do, Dr Mahathir said the Government would think again on whether or not to continue with the plan. The Cabinet would discuss it soon.

"We want them only to witness the election to prove that it is fair, free, clean and honest."

The Prime Minister said he had personally received many letters and also read in the newspapers that many people were unwilling to have foreign observers monitoring the general election.

Yesterday, former Dewan Negara president Tun Omar Ong Yoke Lin, when announcing the formation of a five-man Group of Concerned Citizens (GOCC) headed by him, urged the Government not to allow any local or foreign election observer group to undermine the position, authority and integrity of the Election Commission.

He said the GOCC was against any group to observe the election process in this country as the conduct of the past eight general elections by the commission had never been questioned.

To a question, Dr Mahathir said the Government would not take any action against Election Watch, saying that it has its rights to function.