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No truth in talk on cutting defence ties with S'pore

Kamarul Yunus

THE suggestion that Malaysia would cease defence cooperation with Singapore as a result of strained relations between the two countries is mere speculation, says Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"We have not decided on anything. It is just a speculation," Dr Mahathir said after opening the three-day Heli Asia '98 exhibition in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

On talk that Malaysia is reviewing its participation in the Five-Power Defence Arrangement (FPDA), in which Singapore is also a member, he said: "I don't know about a review ... as far as we are concerned, the agreement is still on."

The other participating countries of the FPDA are the UK, Australia and New Zealand.

The Government will look into complaints and reports of frequent intrusions by Singapore fighter jets despite the withdrawal of a "blanket approval" for the use of Malaysian airspace by Republic of Singapore Air Force (RSAF) aircraft, he said.

Effective September 18, Malaysia had also withdrawn the waiver to apply for diplomatic clearance for RSAF aircraft to conduct low-flying training over Johor and terminated the joint search-and-rescue operations.

On domestic developments, Dr Mahathir said, the police have not and will not use excessive force to deal with the illegal gatherings of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's supporters.

"They use water cannon, just to wet them (demonstrators) ... dampen their spirit. That is all. They have not beaten anybody half-dead," he said, when asked to comment on the disturbance in Kampung Baru last Saturday night.

Unlike previous occasions, the latest demonstration had turned rowdy, with demonstrators throwing stones and sharp objects, causing injuries to policemen and damage to public properties.

"They even brought along with them bottles of kerosene and petrol to produce molotov cocktail," Dr Mahathir said.

Obviously these people are hoping to create a situation similar to that in Jakarta which led to the resignation of former Indonesian President Suharto, he said.

"Of course, they like it to be more violent and continuous so that the Government will be toppled. If the Government is toppled, there will be no trial and Anwar will be get away scot-free," he added.

The Prime Minister was responding to questions regarding acting Umno Youth chief Datuk Hishamuddin Hussein's claim that expelled members of the youth movement were working from abroad to topple the Government through violent demonstrations so that Anwar would not have to go to trial.

The police have not provoked the demonstrators, it was the reverse, he said.

"Obviously, they (demonstrators) want to be provoked ... they need an excuse ... why else would they come armed with sharp objects and stones?" Dr Mahathir said.

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