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Reject violence, people urged (HL)

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - Consumer groups, women's organisations, trade unions and government leaders joined Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today in reminding violent demonstrators that their action would not benefit anyone.

They said the violent protest would not only bring harm to themselves and innocent people but could also be detrimental to the nation.

Two policemen were injured in the violence in Kampung Baru and 268 people were detained and are expected to be charged under the Police Act.

In yesterday's demonstration, several protesters threw stones, bottles and sticks at policemen and their vehicles. Some demonstrators started a bonfire in Jalan Raja Abdullah.

Dr Mahathir, in Langkawi for a half-day visit, urged those involved to practise what they preached regarding the rule of law.

Asked to comment on the demonstration, he said: "The demonstrators have been saying they want to see the rule of law being practised but they themselves are breaching it.

"What type of rule of law are they talking about?"

He said the violence could endanger the lives of demonstrators, including their children who were being used as shields.

Speaking to reporters at Laman Padi, Dr Mahathir advised the people to stay clear of such demonstrations because it would not benefit anyone.

"The Government will not bow to their violence ... Datuk Seri Anwar (Ibrahim) will be tried in accordance with the country's laws. Any attempt to foil the trial will not succeed," he said.

Asked why the demonstrators at Kampung Baru had urged the people to bring along petrol and kerosene, he said: "Why should they be asked to bring these items if their intention was not to cause fires?"

In warning the demonstrators, Dr Mahathir said the Government should not be blamed if the demonstrators were injured by their own molotov cocktails or acts of burning.

"It is their choice ... they must not blame the Government."

Asked whether ex-student activist Hishamuddin Rais was leading the demonstrations, he said: "I do not know whether he is the leader, but we know that he is involved in the demonstration."

Describing Hishamuddin as an ungrateful person, Dr Mahathir said the former student leader had written to him pleading to return to the country, saying that he had repented.

"When he was overseas, he was crying to come home ... he has never been thankful to the Government."

Dr Mahathir said last night's demonstration was similar to (those organised during) the days of Anwar and Hishamuddin in 1974 when he (Dr Mahathir) was the Education Minister.

"We find that the present demonstrations are similar to those before Anwar joined Umno (in 1982).

"It is the same strategy. Since there are similarities, we can assume that the demonstrations are being initiated by the same people."

Asked whether he was aware Hishamuddin was detained last night, he said he did not know because it was the job of the police.

On reports that the Philippine Government was arranging a bilateral meeting between its President Joseph Estrada and Dr Mahathir during next month's Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation Summit in Kuala Lumpur, the

Prime Minister said he had not received any official request.  
\* MORE REPORTS ON P2 & 3

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