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Police action on Saturday was justified, House told

THE police acted fast to protect the safety of the majority when they stopped a gathering organised by Parti Keadilan Nasional supporters last Saturday, the Dewan Rakyat was told yesterday.

Finance ministry parliamentary secretary Hashim Ismail said police action was justified. It was intended to maintain the peace. The organisers could not guarantee the gathering would be peaceful.

"They can say that they are going to have a peaceful demonstration but we cannot take for granted that it will not turn rowdy. The gathering did not materialise as the people wanted peace and stability."

The demonstration was intended to commemorate the first anniversary of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's imprisonment.

Winding up on points raised by MPs at the committee stage for the Supplementary Supply Bill (1999) 2000, he said, the police could not take risks with demonstrations as they could spark riots.

The Opposition need not resort to street demonstrations which could turn rowdy.

"They can express their views through other avenues. They must understand that such demonstrations could create an undesirable situation in the city."

Earlier, Datuk Jamaluddin Mohd Jarjis criticised the Opposition for organising the demonstration.

Datuk Kamaruddin Jaafar (Pas-Tumpat) claimed the Government had used the police to act against those involved even after an assurance that the gathering would be conducted peacefully.

Datuk Yusof Yacob (BN-Sipitang) said the police had every right to clamp down on the gathering.

"All this while, the Government has not stopped or banned gatherings organised by any party. But the Government must take action to stop any ugly incident from happening."

At this juncture, Mahfuz Omar (Pas-Pokok Sena) told the House that the demonstration was supposed to be peaceful but it was Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who said that it would turn rowdy.

Mahfuz and Jamaluddin then engaged in a heated argument which went on for several minutes despite attempts by Deputy speaker Datuk Mohamad Abdullah to stop the commotion.

To points raised by Muhamad Sabu (Pas-Kuala Kedah) on the capital controls implemented by the Government, Hashim said Malaysia had used its own measures to revive the economy.

He said if the Government had let the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank help the country, this would have affected efforts to help the Bumiputeras.

"There would not have been special provisions for Bumiputeras. This would have stunted Government's efforts to help Bumiputeras and put them on par with the other races."

He said the economy had improved significantly.

Forecasts of economic growth were also increasingly optimistic.

Even Merrill Lynch had said the economy had improved significantly and that Malaysia was the best performing market in Asia.

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