

PM: Excessive politics can rock stability

KUALA LUMPUR: As the Opposition mount criticism against the ban on public *ceramah*, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad defended the Government's decision by saying that "excessive politics can rock the nation's stability."

He said the refusal by the Opposition, particularly PAS, to adhere to the decision was a political strategy to get their members arrested so that Malaysia could be accused of being undemocratic and being a police state.

Dr Mahathir said although there was freedom of speech in the country there were limits and excessive PAS politics could rock the nation's stability.

This could not be allowed, he told reporters after presenting excellent service awards at the Treasury here yesterday.

"I explained yesterday (Thursday) that in other democratic countries, after elections are over all campaigning stops.

"But in Malaysia, PAS will continue to campaign until the next general election.

"If they just campaign it is all right, but they get people agitated because their campaigns are centred on hatred towards the Government," he added.

Umno vice-president Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib said the Government had the right to decide whether or not political assemblies could threaten national security.

He said the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (Suhakam), which released a 32-page report on the freedom of assembly in the country, could make recommendations but it was the Government that would bear the responsibility.

Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Dr Mohamad Khir Toyo said if the Opposition went ahead to hold their mass rally this weekend (at Jalan Kebun in Klang), they would be deemed irresponsible and arrogant as the gathering would inconve-

nience the public.

"Their insistence on going ahead with the so called *Karnival Rakyat* is tantamount to undermining the role of the police in maintaining law and order," he told reporters at Sekinchan.

PAS president Datuk Fadzil Noor questioned the legality of police action in stopping *ceramah* because there had not been anything in "black and white" on the matter.

"Please show us the directive from the Home Ministry that all political *ceramah* are against the law and are to be stopped," he said here in an interview.

Fadzil accused the Government of speaking with a "forked tongue" when it said political *ceramah* held within PAS premises would not be stopped.

"Our so-called defiance against the ban of *ceramah* was not because of anything but the promise made by the Deputy Prime Minister (Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi) that he would not stop *ceramah* held within PAS premises," he said.

Fadzil said he was sad over the arrest of two PAS leaders on Thursday under the Internal Security Act after police questioned them over a planned *ceramah* on Aug 12.

Johor PAS youth exco member and teacher, Noorashid Sakib and Larut PAS youth committee member Tajuddin Abu Bakar from Perak were among eight people detained on Thursday for alleged involvement in militant activities.

DAP chairman Lim Kit Siang asked the Prime Minister to immediately withdraw the blanket ban on *ceramah*, following the outcome of the Suhakam report which upheld the citizens' right to legal peaceful assemblies.

He also called on Dr Mahathir to implement the short- and medium-term proposals of Suhakam and urged the police to adopt a more lenient approach in granting permits for assemblies.