

# PM: Security our main concern

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KUALA LUMPUR: The Government is not perturbed by reports that the police had used force on demonstrators and will continue to defend any action that will maintain public order.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said they were more concerned about public security than criticisms levelled at the police on their actions against street demonstrators.

They were commenting on

the recent report by the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (Suhakam) which claimed that police violated human rights in dispersing an illegal gathering at the Kesas Highway on Nov 5 last year.

Dr Mahathir said the overall welfare of the society was more important than bowing down to the demonstrators.

"If you create problems for the people, the police will put an end to it according to the process of the law," he told reporters after launching the Cheras Education Foundation yesterday.

He said the situation in Malaysia was not like in some

Western countries where the police will drag people from their homes and beat them up.

"That is police brutality and this happens in many Western countries.

"But here, when police give the order to demonstrators to disperse, they (the police) will be greeted with 'Come and stop me'. Then the police have no choice but to use force," the Prime Minister said.

He said the police in Malaysia, who have to face the Western media like CNN which takes pictures and show that the police are brutal, now has to face Suhakam as well.

He said the Government has

tried its best to be liberal and this was why it allowed the setting up of Suhakam.

In Malacca, Abdullah said the Government has full confidence in the police force despite the negative report by Suhakam.

The police have been provided the facilities and the responsibility to discharge their duties and protect the interest of the people and nation, he told reporters after opening a National Day seminar.

He said the law required police permits for public gatherings and the issuance of the permit would be based on information and intelligence re-

port on the implication of such gatherings.

"But we have always reminded police personnel not to act beyond the provisions of the law or else action would be taken against them.

Abdullah said the Suhakam report was being studied by the police and Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Dr Rais Yatim.

In Kota Baru, parliamentary secretary to the Information Ministry Senator Datuk Zainuddin Maidin supported a suggestion by Umno supreme council member Datuk Shahrir Abdul Samad that Suhakam be disbanded.

Shahrir was reported yesterday as proposing that Suhakam be disbanded if certain quarters were not ready to discuss human rights issues.

Lawyer Mohamed Apandi Ali said Suhakam's inquiry had contravened the Act that brought about the setting up of the commission.

He said Section 12 of the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia Act 1999 which refers to the powers of inquiry on own motion or on complaint, clearly stated that the commission cannot inquire into any complaint when it is a subject matter of any proceedings pending in any court.