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Dr M: Police acted properly

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said the police had not exceeded their mandate in dispersing the KESAS Highway gathering last November as it was their duty to keep order.

He said it was not as if the police went into private homes to drag people out and beat them.

"That's police brutality and it happens in many developed countries. Here, the people were breaking the law and the police have to stop it," he told reporters after launching Umno Cheras' education foundation.

On Monday, the Human Rights Commission (Suhakam) released its report on the Opposition gathering on Nov 5 last year, finding the police responsible for human rights breaches when dispersing the crowd.

Dr Mahathir said the police's ability to keep order was now hampered as they have to be wary of Suhakam as well as the Western media like CNN.

"The Western press will follow them everywhere to take pictures of 'police brutality' so as to tell the world that in Malaysia, the police are brutal.

"This hampers their ability to enforce the law and protect the citizens."

Asked about Suhakam commissioner Tan Sri Anuar Zainal Abidin's statement that Suhakam's findings were based on facts, Dr Mahathir said the assessment of the facts was influenced by Western thinking.

He said in Malaysia, the welfare of the community was important unlike the West where the rights of the individual was paramount.

He added that the police had to disperse the Nov 5 gathering because it created problems for the public. The police also had to use force because the demonstrators were stubborn.

The Prime Minister pointed out that the West was tolerant of demonstrations until demonstrators arrived at their doorstep. Then, their police also used force, to the extent of shooting dead a demonstrator and running their vehicle twice over the body.

"That's police brutality," he said.

On Suhakam's comment that its report was meant to spur improvements, Dr Mahathir said it should then give the report to the Government but once it was publicised in this manner, it was merely to criticise.

He added that the Government had tried to be liberal by setting up Suhakam.

Dr Mahathir also dismissed Umno supreme council member Shahrir Samad's comment that the Government should shut down Suhakam if it felt that it was a thorn in its side.

"Shahrir can say what he likes. His opinion is of no consequence to me. It is something that I throw into my wastepaper basket," he said.