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Suhakam taken to task (HL)

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SUBANG, Wed. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the report by the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (Suhakam) blaming police for several human rights violations when dispersing an illegal gathering last year was influenced by Western thinking.

The Prime Minister said the commission was not acting in the interest of the nation, adding that its members should think as Malaysians.

"They are very much influenced by Western thinking. They want to prove we are very liberal and all that but the West is not that liberal.

"They (also) beat up demonstrators," he said, alluding to clashes in Genoa (Italy), Vancouver (Canada) and Seattle (United States) where protesters against globalisation were beaten up by police.

Dr Mahathir was speaking at a Press conference upon arrival at the Royal Malaysian Air Force base from Uganda where he attended the four-day Global 2001 Smart Partnership International Dialogue.

He was asked about Suhakam's report on the Kesas Highway-Jalan Kebun illegal gathering last year, which was made public on Monday.

In the report, Suhakam laid the blame for human rights violations on the police, concluding among other things that force was used, property damaged and detainees treated badly. It also said the detainees were denied immediate treatment for injuries.

The commission's inquiry into the incident lasted 20 days and involved 46 witnesses.

On Suhakam's contention that the findings were fair as they were based on evidence gathered during the inquiry, Dr Mahathir felt it should also give some weight to the testimony of police personnel.

"The police also gave their side of the story which should be given some weight. They were working under pressure, having to deal with street demonstrations, a new phenomenon here and something which is encouraged by the West."

Dr Mahathir felt Suhakam looked only at police 'brutality'.

He said one should understand that at times, the police had to resort to force because demonstrators too used force.

"The action of the demonstrators necessitated police action. They want to make Malaysia like some other countries where governments can be toppled by street demonstrations."

Dr Mahathir said in some developed countries that purportedly upheld human rights, action taken by their police to quell demonstrations was much worse.

"In Genoa, a demonstrator was even shot dead by the police. But our police are considerate. In fact, they should be given powers to use force.

"But whatever we do, it will be exaggerated, sometimes by our own people. We are not grateful to our police for maintaining peace in the country."

Dr Mahathir said the Government was concerned about protecting human rights but if people were to resort to violence, the laws had to be enforced.

On the Government's response to the report, Dr Mahathir said he would study it and the recommendations.

On the call for the police to conduct an investigation to determine whether its officers had abused their powers during the incident, Dr Mahathir said: "We will see whether there is a case."

The Prime Minister was also asked about the incident where four Standard Two pupils in a school in Taiping were caught performing oral sex in their classroom, with one of the boys admitting he was merely repeating what he had seen in a pornographic movie watched with his parents.

Dr Mahathir, who appeared stunned when told the boy watched the movie with his parents, said:

"This is moral deterioration. We have moral and religious classes but they are not effective.

"I don't know what is being taught that we produce students with no morals.

"If Muslim students are taught accordingly, with adequate explanation given about the religion, they will not commit this kind of immoral behaviour."

Dr Mahathir said moral decay had set in because the institution responsible for imparting and preserving values was not functioning as it should.

"We know in schools, some religious teachers are more concerned with propagating a certain brand of politics instead of teaching religion, sowing hatred and resentment against the Government among their charges."