

Meet all parties together, EC told

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PORT DICKSON: The Election Commission should meet all political parties together to reach a consensus on matters relating to public rallies, said Youth and Sports Minister Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein.

He said what the commission was doing now, in meeting Barisan Nasional and Opposition parties separately, had given rise to controversial statements and confusion among the public.

"This should not be the case. If the EC is truly independent, then it should discharge its duties and responsibilities in the most appropriate manner without being influenced by any party," he told reporters after opening a Rakan Muda programme in Dataran Sri Kemang here.

On Wednesday, Commission chairman Tan Sri Abdul Rashid Abdul Rahman said rallies, which were previously banned, would be allowed at the next general election as outlined

under the code of ethics.

However, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on Friday reiterated that parties could give their views but ultimately it was the police who decided (on rallies).

Hishammuddin, who is Barisan Youth chief, said: "Even the EC chairman's recent interview by an online newspaper in which he stated that the EC was not truly independent had created further confusion."

In Petaling Jaya, Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said it was more important for Malaysians to be given the right to elect a government of their choice than to be concerned about rallies.

"Whether or not there are public rallies, it does not mean the country is undemocratic. Democracy in Malaysia is recognised by the international community. More importantly, a fair and free election is allowed, which has been the practise since we achieved

Independence," he said after flagging off participants of the National Press Club's annual treasure hunt.

Najib, who is Umno vice-president, said the issue should be left to the police, who were responsible for safety and security, to make their assessment and it should not be "made into a big issue".

In Malacca, Chief Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Ali Rustam said holding rallies would not benefit anyone as experiences had shown that they led to crowd jeering and hurling of insults at each other.

In Penang, DAP said it hoped to convene a meeting with NGOs, EC and Suhakam on Wednesday.

Its chairman Lim Kit Siang said the meeting would discuss the need for a code of ethics for the commission to ensure that it could carry out its constitutional duties to maintain public confidence by conducting free, fair and clean elections.