

19 SEP 2003

Mahathir-Rallies

DR M: POLICE HAVE FINAL SAY ON PUBLIC RALLIES

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 19 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that public rallies during election campaigns can only be held with police approval because such gatherings involve security matters.

The Prime Minister said: "Other parties can give their views but ultimately it is the police who decide."

However, he felt that supporters of political parties, especially the opposition, were not yet mature enough to gather at open rallies without causing disturbances.

This was evident at the Lunas by-election where opposition supporters were rowdy, including assaulting people, trespassing into a police station, detaining a bus and seizing people's identity cards, he told a news conference after chairing the Umno Supreme Council meeting here.

On Wednesday, Election Commission chairman Tan Sri Abdul Rashid Abdul Rahman announced that public rallies, which were previously banned, would be allowed in the next general election as outlined under the election code of ethics.

Asked whether Umno agreed with the EC's view regarding the holding of public rallies, Dr Mahathir said: "We from the government party operate according to the advice given by government agencies because this matter involves security."

"If all say there is no problem, we can agree. This is the people's right in elections," said Dr Mahathir, the Umno president.

The Prime Minister reminded the people that the country was susceptible to threat, and that some supporters of political parties, especially the opposition, were still immature as regards the ways of democracy.

"I think they are not yet mature with regard to the ways of democracy (based on the experience in the last election)," he said.

Dr Mahathir said this was because when opposition supporters felt that they were in big numbers and strong, they would act violently.

Asked on the perception that public rallies reflected the existence of democracy in elections, Dr Mahathir said democracy had various interpretations, and in this country it meant the people's right to choose their representatives through the ballot box.

He said in Malaysia the people were free to choose any party of their choice, and opposition parties which won could form state governments, like in Kelantan and Terengganu, and previously in Penang and Sabah.

"This is the basis of democracy," he said.

"This is the way of democracy. Not by beating people, cursing people, hurling lies and stopping a bus to prevent people from going to vote," he said.

"This is the way of hooligans or gedebe (thugs) in Kelantan dialect," he said.

-- BERNAMA

HK MUN AHH YBY