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`Suhakam not final authority'

Abdul Razak Ahmad; Sharanjit Singh

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - The Human Rights Commission appears to want to be the final authority on all matters, including the issue of public rallies during the next general election, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

The Prime Minister said Suhakam should not consider itself the authority on everything.

He said only the police could determine whether public rallies could be held as Suhakam would not be able to deal with untoward incidents such as fights among those attending rallies.

"I think Suhakam must not consider that it is the authority to decide on everything.

"It appears as if everything must be decided by Suhakam," said Dr Mahathir after witnessing the launch and exhibitors signing ceremony for Lima `05 scheduled to be held in December 2005.

The Prime Minister said this when asked to comment on Umno Youth head Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein's criticism of Suhakam member Datuk Hamdan Adnan on the issue.

Hishammuddin had claimed Suhakam was portraying itself as siding with the opposition in the matter.

This followed an earlier statement by Hamdan that Umno Youth was immature in protesting against the Election Commission's decision to allow public rallies.

Dr Mahathir said any decision on whether public rallies could be held should be left to the police.

"Whether or not public rallies can be held cannot be determined by Suhakam. If anything happens, is Suhakam going to protect the peace?

"If fights break out among those participating, like fist fights, it can't be Suhakam which would deal with it.

"The ones who will be dealing with the matter are the police."

As such, Dr Mahathir said, he would merely consider Suhakam's comments as the commission exercising its right to air its opinions.

"They (Suhakam) have already conveyed their opinion, so let's leave it at that."

On Umno Youth saying that Suhakam was siding with the opposition, Dr Mahathir replied:

"That is a matter of opinion. Umno has freedom to make whatever comments it wants, Umno Youth has the freedom and Suhakam, too, has the freedom to say whatever it wants."