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IGP: Approval for rallies hinges on security assessment

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PENANG, Sun. - Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Norian Mai said today police approval for public rallies in the forthcoming general election hinged on whether the rallies would pose a security threat or affect public order.

Giving his assurance that whatever decisions made by the police would be fair to both the ruling and opposition parties, he also said the police would process the applications expeditiously.

"In the event we are unable to grant approval for a rally, we will give suggestions, such as getting the party to consider alternative locations," he said after officiating at the Royal Malaysian Police golf tournament at the Pearl Island Country Club in Sungai Ara here.

Present were State police chiefs, senior officers in the force and senior judges.

Norian was asked about Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's statement on Friday that the police would have the final say on the issuing of permits for rallies.

The Prime Minister had said while the Government agreed it was the right of the people to hold rallies, it had to bear in mind that the country was also susceptible to threats.

Norian said: "We have in the past four general elections ensured that rallies were held in an orderly manner and did not compromise the country's safety.

"We will use our past experiences to ensure a smooth election," he added.

On Tuesday, Election Commission (EC) chairman Tan Sri Abdul Rashid Abdul Rahman said political parties would be allowed to conduct open-air rallies in general elections provided they obtain police permits.

Meanwhile, DAP leaders will seek meetings with Norian and Rashid to discuss the issue.

DAP chairman Lim Kit Siang said today Malaysians were entitled to know whether the lifting of the 25-year ban on rallies was "for real or would eventually be rescinded".

The DAP had expressed scepticism when Rashid announced earlier in the week that rallies would be allowed in general elections, as it was the police who imposed the ban in 1978.

Therefore, it argued that only the police could lift the ban and not the EC.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Dr Rais Yatim had also said the EC had no legal right to allow public rallies in elections as this (permission for a rally) depended on the discretion of the police, and therefore was subject to the Police Act.