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No permit if rallies jeopardise public order

KUALA PILAH, Sat. - Police will not issue permits for public rallies if they jeopardise public order and the safety of the country.

Deputy Home Minister Datuk Zainal Abidin Zin said if unrest erupted, the election would be disrupted and the forming of a ruling government would be threatened.

He said the forming of a government, in upholding democracy, would not be achieved if there was no guarantee of safety and security.

Zainal Abidin was speaking after opening a HIV/AIDS health awareness programme organised by the District Prostar Club today.

"The forming of a government brings good to the people, whether in the economic, educational or development aspect. But if the security is not guaranteed, this process cannot proceed smoothly," he said.

He added that a newly formed government would not be able to dispense its duties satisfactorily if the country was in chaos.

He was asked to comment on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's statement yesterday that the police had the final say on the issuance of the permits.

Dr Mahathir had said that Umno disagreed with the idea of allowing public rallies as it felt that the people were still not mature enough with regard to democratic processes.

Zainal Abidin said the country had had much experience in facing general elections without holding public rallies.

"Even without public rallies, voters still come out to vote and this shows that the democratic process is ongoing."

He added that public rallies had positive points, as the rallies allowed parties and candidates more room and avenue to campaign.

In Kuala Lumpur, Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak echoed the Prime Minister's statement that police have the final say on the issuing of permits for rallies.

"Even though there are many views on this, we must remember that peace and public security are crucial to ensuring the safety of all parties."

Najib, who is also Umno vice president, said democracy could be interpreted in many ways.

"But the people should have the right to choose the Government in a fair and free election," he said, adding no one should question the validity of the polls.