

Pepper spray attack trial begins
Malaysiakini.com
March 12, 2007

The trial began today for a politician charged with injuring former prime minister Mahathir Mohamad with pepper spray, a court official confirmed.

The trial of Nik Sapeia Nik Yusof is scheduled to last until Thursday, the clerk at the Magistrate's Court in Kelantan told AFP.

Nik Sapeia, 53, is charged with injuring four people including Mahathir on July 28 last year, the state Bernama news agency reported.

The trial date was set Sunday after the court dismissed Nik Sapeia's application to strike out the case, Bernama said.

His trial comes after Sapeia, a businessman, on Saturday took over as Kelantan chairman of the Peoples' Progressive Party (PPP), part of the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition, Bernama reported.

Two factions

Mahathir was hit with pepper spray shortly after he arrived in Kelantan last year, amid a scuffle between two factions of his supporters over whose vehicles would be used to transport him during his visit.

Nik Sapeia was reportedly the leader of one of the factions and a veteran member of the Umno, the ruling party.

Mahathir was hit accidentally, but not seriously hurt by the spray aimed at the rival group's leader.

If convicted, Nik Sapeia could face a maximum three years' jail or a fine, or both.

Mahathir had been accused of fomenting a split in Umno with strident attacks on the administration of his successor, Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Some local Umno politicians had objected to Mahathir's visiting Kelantan in the wake of the feud with Abdullah.

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