

Pepper spray incident sparks a new debate

KOTA BARU: The pepper spray incident here last Friday has taken on a life of its own.

It has now opened a debate on who was responsible for former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's transportation arrangements when he arrived at the airport here.

This was the issue which led to a dispute between two groups, resulting in Dr Mahathir getting a dose of the pepper spray.

Businessman Datuk Nik Sapeia Nik Yusof, who was arrested in connection with the incident, said yesterday that it was his job to arrange for Dr Mahathir's transportation from, the Sultan Ismail Petra Airport to the Renaissance Hotel here.

Nik Sapeia, who was freed from police custody on Tuesday, denied suggestions that he was at the airport to hijack Dr Mahathir's visit to Kelantan.

The 53-year-old former Umno division leader's claims contradicted previous statements by the event organisers such as Datuk Ibrahim Ali, who said Nik Sapeia was not part of the planning committee.

Nik Sapeia said:

"It was a verbal agreement between me and one of the organisers, (Tan Sri) Abdullah Ahmad.

"I was supposed to provide the

transport from the airport to the Renaissance, Abdullah was to handle transportation from the Renaissance, while Ibrahim was only supposed to greet Dr Mahathir," he said.

He was speaking to reporters at his house in Pasir Tumbuh after announcing a RM10,000 donation to the New Straits Times Press (M) Berhad Lebanon Fund.

It was reported that a scuffle broke out between the supporters of two groups, one aligned to Nik Sapeia and the other to Ibrahim, when Dr Mahathir arrived at the airport.

They were fighting for the right to pick up Dr Mahathir.

Just as Dr Mahathir was ushered into a four-wheel drive with Ibrahim, a man pepper sprayed the latter and accidentally hit the former prime minister.

Ibrahim yesterday reiterated that Nik Sapeia was not part of the organising committee.

"He just showed up at the airport with some black-jacketed men, and started acting like Dr Mahathir was in Kelantan for his own programme."

Nik Sapeia countered:

"I do not want to comment other than to say that everyone in Malaysia knows who Ibrahim Ali is."