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Police reject Nazri-Dr M debate notice

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The police has rejected the notice for the debate between former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Tourism and Culture Minister Nazri Aziz, which is planned for March 25 in Kuala Kangsar.

"After examining and considering the reasons the gathering will be held and taking into account safety, public order, protection of rights and public freedom, Kuala Kangsar district police chief Ahmad Termizi Abd Haq has rejected the application and will follow up with a written decision which will be handed to the applicant today," said acting Perak police chief Hasnan Hassan in a statement today.

The much-anticipated debate between Mahathir and Nazri was slated to be held at Maktab Rendah Sains Mara (MRSM) in Kuala Kangsar this Saturday afternoon. Nazri had previously insisted that he would not back out of the debate. Among the reasons cited for the notice rejection, Hasnan said the organiser Karangkrak Media Group had submitted their notice on March 20, which is less than the required 10-day notice as stated under Section 9(1) of the Peaceful Assembly Act 2012 (PAA).

He also said that the police have received written objections in the form of eight police reports from the public and residents of the area, who are concerned about the safety of their families and themselves.

"This is an objection from stakeholders under the PAA," he explained.

The location, MRSM Kuala Kangsar, is a school and is one of the prohibited places as listed in the First Schedule, Section Three of the PAA, he said.

"The police asks for all parties to obey this instruction from the district police chief and strict action will be taken according to the law if it (the debate) still goes on," Hasnan said.

Earlier, the Home Ministry had given its green light to the debate, with Deputy Home Minister Nur Jazlan Mohamed saying they had received an application from the organisers to hold the debate and will approve it. The topics to be raised during the debate include 1MDB, the RM2.6 billion in Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's accounts and the BMF scandal, which occurred during Mahathir's premiership. Nazri, a staunch Mahathir critic, had initially challenged the former prime minister to contest in Padang Rengas, a parliamentary seat he has held since 1995.

Mahathir, who is now the Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (Bersatu), then issued a counter dare to Nazri to contest against him in the Langkawi parliamentary seat instead. He later denied he had plans to contest in the next polls and switched his challenge to a debate, which Nazri readily accepted.