

# PM: Group trying to foil trial <sup>36</sup>

## 5/11/98 Anwar supporters accused of seeking to topple Govt

KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said supporters of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim wanted to topple the Government to prevent his former deputy from facing criminal trial.

Speaking to *Reuters* in an interview, Dr Mahathir said judges and witnesses in the case had been threatened.

"People have been ringing up, threatening the judges and other people, threatening witnesses, and this is not good for justice.

"People should not threaten or intimidate judges, even by their presence," he said.

Anwar, who was sacked on Sept 2 and arrested 18 days later, has pleaded not guilty to 10 charges of sodomy and

corruption.

His High Court trial is set to begin tomorrow.

Dr Mahathir was asked if he thought anti-government protests would taper off with the start of the trial.

"No, I think that they will try to protest because their idea is to frustrate the trial through violent protests," he said at the opening of *Reuters*' new offices here.

"They are hoping that the Government will fall, and if the Government falls, then there will be no trial, and all those things that he is charged with, will not be heard," he said.

Dr Mahathir, who said he would wait until next year before deciding when to step down, said it would not be

appropriate for Philippine President Joseph Estrada to visit Anwar in custody as it would intimidate the courts.

Estrada has said he might try to visit Anwar in detention during the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation (Apec) summit in Kuala Lumpur in mid-November.

"He can do that at some other time. But Apec is not the time, nor would we want him to visit Anwar because the trial is going on, and such a visit has the effect of intimidating the courts," he said.

He said Anwar's supporters wanted to put the judge and the court on trial.

"They are not interested in Anwar," he said.

"But they are trying to

make out that Anwar is not going to have a fair trial and that is not right," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he did not think Apec leaders would discuss political unrest in Malaysia, where there have been sporadic anti-government demonstrations since the day Anwar was arrested.

"Apec is about the economy, it is not about politics. If they want to talk about politics then we can have another forum meant for politics.

"But, if they want to ask me questions about the political situation in this country, I'm quite willing to answer them, no problem," he said.

Apec leaders including US President Bill Clinton will be in Kuala Lumpur for the summit from Nov 17 to 18.

The Prime Minister was also asked what he planned to do once Umno selected a new deputy leader.

"Obviously I can't just step down like that. I have to wait and see how things are put in place and how things function.

"And once I'm satisfied that they can go on, and I think at that stage, as a responsible leader, I can resign.

"I can't resign just because I want to save myself," he said.

Asked if he would agree to step down by a set date once his deputy was chosen, he said:

"Once my deputy is chosen, I will make up my mind when to step down."