

Gag request by Anwar's lawyers puzzles Dr M

KUCHING: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is puzzled why Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's lawyers asked the court to order everyone to stop making comments on the guilt or innocence of the former deputy prime minister, who is now standing trial for corruption and unnatural sex charges.

The Prime Minister said Anwar's lawyers have all the while been championing the rights to freedom of speech but now they are acting otherwise.

He also said Anwar's law-

yers had made press statements to the foreign media which were biased in their reporting.

"But we respect the decision of the court and we expected them (Anwar's lawyers) and Anwar's supporters to do so as well," he said during a press conference before his return to Kuala Lumpur after a five-hour visit to Sarawak.

High Court Judge Augustine Paul on Monday had issued a gag order on Anwar's case so that the latter could have a fair trial.

However, Dr Mahathir said the court's order would not affect Umno's briefing on Anwar's sacking to its grassroots members as it would be done in closed door meetings, he added.

Earlier at the opening of the RM6mil SRB Chung Hua No. 6 at Taman Wee and Wee, Dr Mahathir reiterated his support for the Malaysian judiciary system.

"We will uphold our belief in democracy and the democratic system. We will uphold the rights of the court and respect

their findings.

"The court will decide who is right and who is wrong and that is the system of our country." *S 7.10.98*

Dr Mahathir also declined to comment on reports that certain leaders may boycott the Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation summit in Kuala Lumpur.

"If they do not want to attend, it is up to them," he said.

In Kuala Lumpur, Umno secretary-general Datuk Sabbaruddin Chik said the party must respect the High Court's order

barring public comment on the sodomy and corruption charges faced by Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Sabbaruddin said Umno could not take the ruling lightly as it was from the court.

Sabbaruddin said the High Court order would not affect Umno's plan to distribute video tapes of the Prime Minister's explanation on Anwar's sacking.

"The video tape of Dr Mahathir's explanation at Putra World Trade Centre was done on Sept 8. He has already said

it, so it could be used," he said.

In Penang, Wanita Gerakan deputy chief Rhina Bhar welcomed the gag order.

She urged the public to observe the order as a breach of the order would be construed a contempt of court.

She said in a statement that since the law of the country stated that an accused person was innocent until proven guilty, both supporters and non-supporters of Anwar should patiently wait for the outcome of the verdict and respect the gag order.