

PM: Anwar 'arrested' by followers

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KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said his former deputy Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim is "being put under house arrest" by his own followers who are out to create problems.

The Prime Minister said Anwar was "arrested" by his followers wherever he went.

"I can assure you that if he wants to go around walking alone in any part of Malaysia, he can.

"But if he drags along 1,000 people who are willing to create a problem whenever legal action is taken against him, then in that sense, he is arrested by them already.

"He has decided his followers should surround him and keep him there," he said when asked about press reports that Anwar was "virtually under house arrest."

He was speaking to reporters to announce the appointment of Salomon Smith Barney as financial adviser to the Government at Carcosa Seri Ne-

gara yesterday.

On Anwar's challenge to have him charged in court, Dr Mahathir, who is Home Minister, replied:

"Yes, but he has thousands of people sitting around him and he has promised that if anybody tries to take him away, he will be followed by thousands of people.

"So it looks like he is trying to find a way to start a riot.

"If he truly believes in the courts, which he earlier said he did not believe in, then there is no need for people to

be around him to create trouble.

"(He should) allow the process of law to proceed smoothly.

"If anybody gets hurt, then he will get full publicity especially in the international press. That is what he wants.

"You see, he is considering himself as being different from ordinary citizens in this country.

"Other citizens, if they get arrested, they are arrested.

"Nobody creates any problem but here he is surrounding

himself with a lot of small boys and university students and all that," he added.

Asked whether Anwar would be charged, the Prime Minister said the police were still investigating and once there was sufficient evidence, he would be charged.

He said Umno leaders were not banned from going to Anwar's house, adding:

"There is no ban. They want to go, they can go."

Asked whether this would be perceived as support for Anwar, Dr Mahathir replied:

"Two to three people, yes. We have 2.4 million members, so we can spare those two or three.

"They can stay there permanently. They can sleep there."

The Prime Minister shrugged off a question on whether he was worried about the growing support for Anwar.

"Do I look like a man who is worried?" he laughed.

He also felt that the current political situation would not affect people's perception that Malaysia was stable.