

Dr M: Problem with Anwar will not affect the nation ²²

THE following is a transcript of the press conference with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday at Carcosa Seri Negara on the issue of former deputy prime minister and finance minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Q: Do you think the spat between you and Datuk Seri Anwar will affect in any way fund-raising measures for the country? Are people perceiving Malaysia these days as being any less politically stable?

A: No, I don't think it's going to affect anybody's perception of Malaysia. It's quite obvious that people playing the stock market are fairly happy.

They have been buying and selling. They have been behaving in a normal way.

So you can see that it has not affected the sentiment of the market and I don't think there will be any long term effect from

this little problem

Q: Last night (Wednesday night), Anwar challenged you to have him charged in court.

A: 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.

Q: There are press reports which claim that Anwar is "virtually under house arrest." As the Home Minister, can you please comment on this.

A: He is arrested by his own followers surrounding him wherever he goes. I can assure you that if he wants to walk alone in any part of Ma-

laysia, 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's decided his followers should surround him and keep him there.

Q: Anwar has claimed that the reason he is doing this is because he no longer has access to the mainstream media.

A: I don't think so. He has got a lot of publicity, more than I have and certainly very positive publicity in the international media. I never get that. You know, recently they wrote some nasty things about me which is not fair at all. So, I should also be surrounded by my followers because of this attack by the media.

Q: How do you feel about being verbally attacked by your former deputy prime minister whom you were once close to?

A: I have been attacked

by deputy prime ministers before. It is a common occurrence and part of the problems that politicians must be prepared to face. *5/11-9-98*

Q: Will Anwar be charged in court?

A: The police are still investigating. I am quite sure when they have sufficient evidence to charge him in court, they will charge him.

But I suspect he will be waiting with about one to two thousand people around him so as to create problems and if anybody gets hurt, then he will get full publicity especially in the international press. That is what he wants.

You see, he considers 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.

They know the police

cannot do anything without hurting these people. And if they hurt these people, of course people will say "Look, police brutality". But there is no police brutality unless you yourself make it difficult for the police to carry out their duty.

Q: But there are Umno leaders being seen going to Anwar's house.

A: We have not banned Umno leaders from seeing him. There is no ban. They want to go, they can go.

Q: But wouldn't this be seen as support for Anwar?

A: We have 2,400,000 members so we can spare two or three (people). They can stay there permanently also. They can sleep there.

Q: Aren't you worried about the growing support for Anwar?

A: (Laughs) I don't look like a man who is worried. He doesn't look like a man who

is worried? (Laughs).

Q: Can you explain about your call during your briefing for Umno leaders for **sembahyang** hajjat (special prayers) to be carried out.

A: I did not call for these prayers so that I would win or that he would lose or for God to be angry with him. I only asked for **sembahyang hajjat so** that the truth will eventually be a reality. If I am right, I am right. If he is right, he is right.

Q: How long more are the authorities going to allow the nightly **ceramahs** (speeches) at Anwar's house?

A: Well, this is a democratic country. If we stop (the **ceramahs**) then the media, especially the foreign media, will say that we are repressive. So we will have to put up with it. It's something that one has to submit to if one believes in democracy.