

Mahathir: Witnesses told me about sex with Anwar

Excerpts from Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's press conference at the Prime Minister's office yesterday:

Q: Judging from the crowd (at Anwar's rallies), (there is the) impression not to believe allegations about Anwar. Is the Government going to do anything to tell people about the evidence?

A: Yes, but I must say the crowd was not made up of all supporters or believers of Anwar, some of them are there for curiosity and some to see the show at Dataran Merdeka. But it is quite true that a lot of people still believe in him. I must say even for me it took me years to believe allegations made against him. First time I was told about him was by the previous IGP Hanif, I dismissed it as a false allegation.

Subsequently, I was told last year about him. I dismissed this and I said this is just out of sheer jealousy for my man who is going to be a leader of the party. I had concrete proof that it was true, before I could leave but other people cannot very well get that kind of information that I got. I actually interviewed the people who were sodomised, the women whom he had sex with, the driver who brought the women to the place.

This was told to me without the presence of police or anybody and I told them: 'if you are forced into making confessions please tell me, I will protect you.' But they said no, they were not forced by the police, 'we are telling the truth' and several said this man is not fit to become the leader.

Do you think the police were too violent in getting on with the arrests (of protesters)?

I don't think they are violent. If you look at the way (of the) L. A. police, the way they handled things was much more violent than that. Actually when you are dealing with an unruly crowd, a certain degree or amount of force has to be used. I would like to ask anybody who feels like they want to carry out the job of a policeman to try and arrest violent people.

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certainly a certain degree of violence had to be used but I think it was minimal. Nobody was hurt, and even when arrested, he was given the chance to come peacefully. He was not, like in some countries, put in chains. In this country he was not even handcuffed. He wanted his family to follow, he was allowed that and they were subsequently sent home.

Will Anwar be charged?

Yes. I think when the police are good and ready they will charge (him).

When?

That is not something I interfere with. That is up to the prosecutor, the police, when they are ready they will make the necessary charges.

The former IGP did tell you that Anwar had homosexual relationships?

Yes, I was told about it before he retired. That was some years ago. I don't know (when). But I chose not to believe because I found it hard to believe about a man who projects himself as a religious man.

Was Anwar trying to challenge you?

What is there (to challenge)? I am going to retire. I already made him my successor. Why is there a need to challenge? But if he in fact plans to overthrow me by making this accusation which he has since admitted although that time every time he was smiling.

I knew about it but I chose to ignore it because to me it is quite irrelevant. If he was chosen by party members, okay, he is welcome to it. If he thinks he can challenge, I think I can contest against him. I have contested against others.

The Australian Prime Minister said you are heading towards authoritarianism. Do you accept that?

I think being authoritarian is making an accusation before you even find the real facts. What actually should be done is listen to both sides and make a very reasonable opinion, but when you read the newspapers and you make an opinion based on that, I think that is very difficult.

So the Australian Prime Minister is wrong?

The Prime Minister is wrong, absolutely.

When you explained to Umno **divisional leaders the other day, you did not explain in detail what Anwar did, do you think this has made it difficult** for them to go to the ground to explain?

I think it is difficult for me to explain and I think it is difficult for them to explain. Let me explain what the police tell me what (Dr Munawar Ahmad) Aness said. (Dr Mahathir describes a sexual act). Is this what I go around the town and the world telling what my deputy was doing, and yet he did.

I cannot understand how a man would invent a story like that but this is what he told the police. Their behaviour was despicable and this is a man who talks about other people being despicable.

Will it be difficult to get people in rural areas to believe what Anwar did?

Difficult for us, my colleagues, difficult for us to move and tell whole groups of rural people, including children and women what has happened. You know that Clinton's admission about sex with Lewinsky, published all over, children are reading about

it; we are a very conservative society. We don't talk about this.

Will the Government protect Anwar's family?

They have done no wrong, who is going to attack them? But if they are (attacked), we will protect them. Every citizen will be protected, no more no less, and he will be subjected to the same law which applies to everybody else. The law is there unless you are saying a person against the Government is privileged. So, of course I cannot say anything but in this country there are no privileged. We have acted against our members.

How many MBs have been taken to court and found guilty and had to leave their job and some ministers, one or two ministers, were jailed. All these things we have done to members of our own party although I must say the fact that charges preferred against them did not result in them resigning from the party or going against the party. Some were found not guilty but still our party cannot re-admit them as leaders because we felt they dishonoured the party.

Do you think you will remain as leader longer?

Hope not for too long. But I must have a man who is capable to carry on, a man who is trustworthy and honourable. I could have found some other reason to get rid of him which is political, but it is unfortunate that it has resulted in this, and certainly I have enough problems at this time, what with the economy, Sukom, having a lot of reporters in the country. A wrong time for me to do all these things deliberately, if I can I would avoid.

What of Malaysia's image overseas?

For the time being, I am quite sure as the friends of Anwar,

people who respect him, are going to feel very bad about him. I have received messages from some of his friends accusing me of being a dictator. But eventually the truth will prevail. If the truth is that he didn't do this, that is the truth but if it is true he had done all these things and it is proven, I hope people will accept the truth and not say even if it is true, but he is my friend and therefore I cannot accept what is the truth.

Why is it that the court was hastily organised on Saturday? Why were lawyers of the family not given information in advance, the legal system not working too fast, but on Saturday (everything) happened in an hour-and-a-half when two people were charged?

We are facing problems of not having credibility and police have been accused by Anwar of being biased. The police want to ensure that they clear their own names and they are anxious as anybody else to get this thing thrown out as soon as possible. The choice of time is certainly not mine. If I had my way, I would rather not have this happen during Sukom. I want to enjoy (the Games) but I have no means of telling the police that you have to face this and accept being accused by Anwar.

Were Umno members also involved in the demonstrations?

I think they are involved, otherwise why detain them? We have some 2.4 million members.

What do you think will be the fate of the Umno Youth chief?

That is not for me to determine. I think, I don't really know whether charges being preferred were under the ISA but he has been involved in organising rallies and the rallies were illegal.

What about his fate in the party? That will be determined by the party. I don't determine by myself.

In order to explain to the public, shouldn't you charge him first?

How fast he is going to be charged is not something for me to decide. That is (up to) the public prosecutor and the police to charge. But I am quite sure they feel the need to investigate. They themselves have been accused by Anwar, they are being called members of Mossad, Gestapo. They are trying to be professional. They want to do a proper job. If it takes time, we have to give them time. They can't rush to do all these things if they are not prepared.

Will the organisers of Anwar's gatherings be charged?

Police decision, I don't know.

When Anwar gave a speech at the National Mosque, he alleged that Dr Munawar and Sukma were drugged by the police before they pleaded guilty.

It's not easy to drug people, force them to confess, bring them to court and make lots of statements. He (Munawar) even asked lawyers who came to represent him to go away. Usually, people who are drugged would be sleepy and drowsy.

Do you think they (Anwar's supporters) should wait until the court proceeds with the case and all evidence brought up?

Yes, they should have waited until the case was brought up normally and accept the court's decision. He has the right to the extent of appealing. We cannot deny him the right because Malaysia has laws. We follow the Malaysian laws.

Anwar claimed that he has facts and evidence of corruption done overseas.

He is welcome to use them. Please expose. He has even accused me of being involved with corruption. In fact, in front of me he mentioned about it.

How do you assess the effect of the situation in relation to the damage done to the economy?

We think we can manage our economic policy better than others simply because now it is internalised, and not subject to pressure from outside. Even though we have this problem, you may notice the share market has not fallen; a few points yes but no more than what happens in other share markets. So, fortunately for us, we have taken these measures, if we had not taken these measures, then foreign investors will lose confidence, another depreciation in the currency, all of these designed to pressure us.

Will Anwar's issue continue to affect the economy?

Not much, some people are bound to be affected, the share market has fallen a bit. The people in this country know exactly the situation in the country. They know the capability of the Government in handling situations like this. They are not unduly agitated as to depress the shares.

Is Salomon Smith Barney (Mala&a' financial advisers) af-

.. They are trying to raise capital and impression of people who may be interested in placing their funds at our disposal, their impression might be influenced by media reporting about myself now as a dictator.

When is the general election?

Some people say that Sukom is a good indicator. We will allow the people to get over Sukom first.