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Abdullah: Interference with our judiciary not acceptable (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Malaysia regards any interference with its judicial process as "unacceptable" as it could affect the course of justice, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today.

He said such interference gave the wrong impression that the country's judges did not know how to apply the law judiciously.

Abdullah was speaking at a Press conference after a meeting between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Swaziland's King Mswati III at the Prime Minister's Department.

He was asked to comment on a news report last Saturday which said High Court judge Augustine Paul, who is presiding the case involving sacked Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, had received a telephone call from a man claiming to be a US Senator.

The caller had reportedly told the judge he will be closely monitoring the case which begins in the High Court on Nov 2. Anwar, who has been detained under the Internal Security Act since Sept 20, is facing five counts of sodomy and five counts of corruption.

The caller also told Paul that justice must be seen to be done.

The judge lodged a police report at the Dang Wangi police station the next day. It is believed that several other people had also received similar calls.

Abdullah said: "This is one example of interference we cannot accept. Such action is tantamount to interference as though we do not understand the law and are unable to enforce the law well.

"I am sure the judge who received the call would have felt insulted."

While it is still not known if the caller was actually a US Senator, recent statements from several US politicians and government officials have been partial towards Anwar suggesting that he might not be given a fair trial.

US Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin was reported to have stated forcefully recently that what had happened to Anwar was "deeply, deeply, deeply troubling".

In a recent article in the New York Times, former Democratic Senator Sam Nunn, together with Douglas Paal and Paul Wolfowitz, former officials who had served under the Reagan and Bush administrations, called for Anwar's release and said that he should be given a fair trial.

"Anwar should be released on bail until his case goes to trial, and he should be given proper protection. His trial must be open and fair."

Nunn, who is known to be a close friend of Anwar, also called on the Malaysian Government to allow its people "to conduct orderly demonstrations supporting (or opposing) him, not chased through the streets and arrested".

He said to protect Malaysia's good name and to attract foreign investments, Anwar and his associates should be allowed to voice their opinions and be given due process. "It will be sad, too, if leaders attending the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation forum in Malaysia next month do not seek to ease Anwar's plight."

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