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Anwar beaten to a pulp, defend him, says Patten

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - The former Governor of Hong Kong Chris Patten had recently called on the international finance community to throw its weight behind ousted Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Patten called Anwar the epitome of "all that the global economy wants of a finance minister in a developing country," in an opinion piece he penned for the Oct 11 issue of the London Independent newspaper. His article was headlined "We must defend the finance minister with a black eye."

"Until he was ousted as Malaysia's Finance Minister and Deputy Premier a few weeks ago, Anwar Ibrahim had been for years the deserved darling of the international financial community..."

"He has called for free trade and open markets, for effective regulation of banks and financial services, for greater openness and transparency in Asia's financial management, for an attack on corruption and nepotism, for the rule of law, for civil liberties, and - what more provocation will this man offer? - greater democracy," Patten wrote.

"For years now, Anwar Ibrahim has won plaudits for his courage, honesty and competence. The great and the good of the international finance world took Anwar to their bosom. He was their brave exemplar, their friend."

Patten noted that some members of the international community, such as United Nations secretary-general Kofi Annan, World Bank President James Wolfensohn and the United States' Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin had all expressed concern over Anwar's case.

However, he said that "more than concern is surely required."

Patten urged central bank governors and finance ministers not to listen to arguments that they should stay out of internal Malaysian politics.

"So have not events required our intervention again and again in the domestic politics of other Asian countries?," he wrote.

"Secondly, they will be advised that for finance ministers and central bankers to say anything about Anwar Ibrahim would be to sink into grubby politics, something, of course, that they never do.

"Why don't they try telling that to, say, the Indonesians, who are at present wrestling with some courage (at last) with the political consequences of what the international financial community has asked them to do."

Patten also said the international finance community might have been advised to avoid making any statements on the matter for fear that it would hamper any potential business with Malaysia.

"Who's kidding whom? What are the great projects that Malaysia's new brand of siege economics is going to be able to finance in the future?" Haven't we learned the real lesson of the Asian crash - that the best countries in which to do business are the countries that treat their citizens the most decently?

Patten said the ethical price of ignoring Anwar's case would be too high.

"Anwar Ibrahim represented everything that the international community has asked of Asia in the last decade. It's as simple as that.

"Now that he is being beaten to a pulp for what he believes - his brave wife terrorised, his children distraught - are we simply to keep our counsel, worried lest (Datuk Seri) Dr Mahathir (Mohamad) should stamp his foot at us?"

Patten noted that British Foreign Minister Robin Cook had mentioned Anwar's case to his Malaysian counterpart Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi during Queen Elizabeth's September visit to Malaysia to close the Commonwealth Games.

"I am sure that Mr Cook had no idea that...Anwar Ibrahim was just down the road being beaten up by the police - blindfolded and thrashed until he lost consciousness. But at least the Commonwealth Games ended peacefully, without any embarrassment to anyone.

"But isn't it time that there was some embarrassment? If Asians are to take seriously what we keep on saying about political freedom and economic liberty, doesn't there have to be a moment when we put our mouths where our principles are supposed to be?

Patten called Anwar a symbol of a better and brighter future that could not be allowed to "return to the shadows."

"To abandon him now would be to throw away our moral authority in arguing for pluralism and open markets around the world," Patten wrote.

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