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Mahathir-Anwar

ANWAR DOESN'T UNDERSTAND ECONOMIC MANAGEMENT, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 23 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today sacked finance minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim did not understand how to manage the finance or economy of the country, resulting in many economic problems.

"Unfortunately he doesn't understand finance or economic management. He can talk but he really doesn't understand how to manage the economy.

"Now he is not there, I think we can manage the economy better. Already there is result," Dr Mahathir, who has taken over as First Finance Minister, said when addressing Chinese community leaders who called on him at the Prime Minister's Department, here.

He said Anwar was also responsible for shortening the period for classification of non-performing loans (NPLs) from six months to three months, thus creating economic problems.

"He is the one responsible... actually shortening the period for the NPLs which created a lot of difficulties for business, he is the one responsible for reducing the amount of money in circulation, preventing people from borrowing and lots of other things when he was minister of finance," he said.

"But I was able to counter that... Of course now he is not there, it is easier for me and there is no need for me to argue with him," he said.

Anwar was dismissed as deputy prime minister and finance minister on Sept 2 and expelled from Umno the following day for alleged sexual misconduct.

Dr Mahathir said he was strong enough to take on any challenges from Anwar, if he had wanted to challenge him in Umno.

"He can challenge me in politics. That doesn't matter because I think I am strong enough in Umno. Other people have challenged me before and you know where they are now.

The Umno president was also confident that he enjoyed the support of Umno members even if Anwar were to use money politics.

He said that by divulging issues like cronyism Anwar hoped that he (Dr Mahathir) would become unpopular and expected members at the recent general assembly to boo him but they did not.

"So politics is something that I can handle, even the economy I can handle. Even if he (Anwar) is there," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said that the way Anwar unseated Tun Ghafar Baba in the 1993 Umno elections was not proper.

On Anwar's sacking, Dr Mahathir said it was his right to sack him.

"In any country the prime minister can dismiss the cabinet. Japan changes the government every month. It is my right to dismiss," he said, reiterating that Anwar was unfit to be a leader because of his alleged sexual misconduct.

"He committed sodomy with a number of people. At first I cannot believe. He poses like a religious man. But we have strong evidence," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Anwar was trying to avoid his trial by using students and followers to create problems at the courthouse.

"He himself had said that 1,000 people would follow him if he went to jail," he said.

Noting that many among the group gathered outside the courthouse wore headbands, Dr Mahathir said Anwar also tried to create an Indonesia-like

situation to force him to resign.

"He thinks that by creating chaos like in Indonesia, he will not be tried and the government can be toppled. And he will be freed. And he even hopes he can be the prime minister or leader of the government," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Anwar's wife, Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail was also trying to get arrested to get sympathy.

Calling on everyone to strive for peace and prosperity to ensure the quick recovery of the country's economy, he said Malaysia was a great country built together by its people and the people must work hard to ensure continuous peace and prosperity.

At today's function, the prime minister received some 100,000 greeting cards in several bundles pledging support from Malaysians.

Transport Minister and MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik who handed over the greeting cards said it showed patriotism, confidence and full support of the Malaysian people to the prime minister.

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