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Anwar `gets special treatment in prison'

DATUK Seri Anwar Ibrahim is being given special treatment at the Sungai Buloh remand prison while he awaits trial next month, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

Although the law requires that everyone be given equal treatment while in prison, "I understand he is being treated like a VIP. He is given special food, his accommodation is different from ordinary prisoners. Normally, they put several prisoners in one cell, but I am told he has a special room to himself. He has a mattress and is treated very special."

Dr Mahathir said this in reply to a question about concerns expressed by Philippine President Joseph Estrada and others about treatment for the former Deputy Prime Minister since his arrest on Sept 20.

Dr Mahathir believed that both Estrada and Indonesian President B.J. Habibie's comments were based on reports by the Western media which makes out that Malaysia is undemocratic, unjust and unfair.

Dr Mahathir, who arrived in Tokyo yesterday for a five-day working visit, met the Japanese media. They included representatives from Nihon Keizai Shimbun, Mainichi Shimbun, Yomiuri Shimbun, Asahi Shimbun, Kyodo News, Tokyo-Chunichi Shimbun, The Japan Times and N.H.K.

During the hour-long meeting, he was asked questions relating to Anwar, Malaysia's exchange rate controls, the financial crisis which started in Thailand and now threatens the whole world, hedge funds, the role of Japan and the upcoming Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation meeting in Kuala Lumpur.

Meanwhile, Bernama quoted him as saying he would stay on as Prime Minister for some time after scrapping plans to retire at the end of the year.

He said he was not sure how long he would stay on the job but he had to give some time for his successor to do his work before he could decide to step down.

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