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Mahathir-Anwar

ANWAR GIVEN SPECIAL TREATMENT IN PRISON, SAYS MAHATHIR

By: Azman Ujang

TOKYO, Oct 17 (Bernama) -- Former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim is given special treatment while under remand in prison pending his trial next month, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said here today.

He said although the law requires that everyone must be given equal treatment regardless of their position while in prison, " I have been made to understand that he's being treated like a VIP".

"He's given special food, his accommodation is different from ordinary prisoners.

" Normally of course, they put several people in one cell, I'm told that he has a special room to himself, he has mattress, he's treated very special," said Dr Mahathir in an interview arranged for eight Japanese media organisations here.

The prime minister, now on a five-day visit to Japan, was asked about concerns expressed by Indonesian President B.J.Habibie and Philippine President Joseph Estrada as well as human rights organisations about the treatment for Anwar since his arrest on Sept 20.

Anwar, who was sacked on Sept 2, and subsequently arrested under the Internal Security Act (ISA) following street demonstrations by his supporters, has since been released from ISA detention but is under remand in the Sungai Buloh prison outside Kuala Lumpur pending his trial set to begin on Nov 2 on four counts of corruption.

During the one-hour interview, Dr Mahathir was asked many times about the police treatment for Anwar following his appearance in court with bruises on his face and left eye, and reports that the two Asean leaders might skip next month's Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Kuala Lumpur out of sympathy for Anwar.

He said if Presidents Habibie and Estrada decided not to attend the APEC summit, they would be missing something because it would discuss some very important economic matters given the economic crisis in the region.

But in jest Dr Mahathir said as someone who once boycotted the APEC summit in Seattle in 1993, he could understand the feelings of Habibie and Estrada.

" I don't know President Estrada that well but I know Habibie. Of course it's true that he knows Anwar better than he knows me, naturally he's sympathetic towards the former deputy prime minister but APEC is about economic matters and not about politics.

And he said it would be a "tragedy" if APEC was converted into a political forum because if this was done, the forum would be having a lot of differences.

On a suggestion by President Estrada that Anwar be placed under house arrest and not treated like a common criminal, the Prime Minister said : "He's treated very special. I think Mr Estrada can go and see him whether the treatment is right or not".

Asked about the shock felt in Japan and other countries about police treatment for a former deputy prime minister, Dr Mahathir said he was equally shocked himself because it was unusual for the police to harm people in a way that the whole world would know as the impression on the police would be very bad.

He pointed out that there would be no cover-up on the ongoing investigations into the alleged police brutality on Anwar, adding that

there were even allegations he himself had punched Anwar or that he had authorised the police to do the punching.

"This accusation is crazy... this thing happened in police custody so we have to find out who had done it and would take the necessary action against the people concerned."

Dr Mahathir said the report on the Anwar-bashing probe would be given to the Attorney-General who would decide on the next course of action.

"As far as the government is concerned, there'll be no cover-up. It's not good for the government," he said.

He reminded the Japanese media that the Malaysian court had ordered a gag on public discussion on the guilt or innocence of Anwar's legal case and he was bound by this.

Turning to the APEC summit, he said he was told by United States authorities that US President Bill Clinton would be coming and so also is Russian President Boris Yeltsin.

Asked if he would have a one-to-one meeting with Clinton, Dr Mahathir said as host of the summit he would not have separate meetings with the heads of government.

"The APEC meeting is a meeting of heads of government and not a meeting between one head and another," he added.

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