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Anwar: I didn't make any suggestion of contesting presidency next year

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Umno deputy president Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said today he did not make any suggestion to the effect that he would contest the presidency at next year's party elections.

Anwar told a Press conference at the end of the first day of the Umno general assembly that his statement in Johor recently was misinterpreted, especially by the foreign media.

Dr Mahathir, who was also present at the Press conference, said he would support Anwar if there was a contest for the deputy president's post.

"We feel that if people want to have a contest, by all means they can do so but if there is any contest against my deputy, I will support the incumbent," Dr Mahathir said when asked to comment on the call by some delegates that there should be no contest for the top two posts.

Clarifying his remarks in Johor, Anwar said: "At no time did I make any reference to the possibility of me challenging the president. It is only the interpretation of some of you, particularly the foreign media.

"What I said in Johor was that while we recognise the role of the currency traders and the flaws in the international financial system, we will have to make the necessary adjustments ourselves.

"That we have been doing. We have been making the necessary adjustments by introducing some new programmes such as the setting up of the Asset Management Company, foster good corporate governance as well as more effective and regulatory framework."

Anwar, who is also Deputy Prime Minister, was asked whether he would challenge the party president at Umno's elections next year.

He said he had made specific reference to the matter in his speech at the opening of the Youth and Wanita assemblies yesterday.

In his speech, Anwar called on party members to be united under Dr Mahathir's leadership to face the trying times.

He said there was a need for all quarters to make sacrifices, refrain from promoting self-interest and avoid party factionalism.

On why action had not been taken against former Perwaja Steel Sdn Bhd managing director Tan Sri Eric Chia although it had been alleged that he had committed criminal breach of trust, Dr Mahathir said:

"We abide by the laws. The laws require sufficient evidence before action is taken against anyone. When there is enough evidence, we will act.

"We are not like certain countries where action is taken based on suspicion and without evidence."

He said history had shown that the authorities acted on those who broke the law although they were said to be "cronies".

He said even during Tunku Abdul Rahman's term of office, action was taken against those guilty of wrongdoings.

"The process of law is in place and we have to follow it. We cannot take action against anyone simply because of our hatred, anger or suspicion."

Dr Mahathir was also asked to comment on the statement by Youth chief Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi yesterday that his son Mokhzani, who is the movement's treasurer, was a bridge between the Youth wing and the leadership.

"I don't think the Youth chief meant it this way because he is a member of the supreme council and there is no need for my son to be the bridge between the council and the Youth movement."

He said there was no need for his son to influence him because all members of the supreme council could speak freely at the council meetings.