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Anwar's actions will not affect economy: Mahathir

GOVERNMENT measures to revive the economy are not affected by the so-called political turmoil following Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's sacking from the Cabinet and Umno, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

"People in this country know exactly the situation. Nobody's dumping shares because there's political turmoil," he told a press conference called to explain the outcome of a special Umno supreme council meeting on Monday.

He was asked if the Government's economic revival efforts are being derailed by problems created by Anwar's dismissal and if Monday's Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange (KLSE) Composite Index's 14.98-point fall was not a reflection of this.

Dr Mahathir, who is also the First Finance Minister, pointed out that contrary to this suggestion, the KLCI has been quite steady over the past few trading days.

"You may notice our share market has not fallen much," he said.

The KLCI closed 7.13 points higher to close at 385.45 yesterday. Last Friday, the KLCI had gained 6.75 points.

Dr Mahathir said local investors are the major players in the KLSE now and they are aware of the situation and of the Government's ability to deal with the situation.

He admitted, however, that Salomon Smith Barney, the newly-appointment financial adviser to Malaysia, may meet some difficulties in trying to raise funds overseas because of the impression given to foreign investors by what has been reported about the issue.

Anwar, who was removed as Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister on September 2 and sacked from Umno the next day, was arrested under the Internal Security Act for leading his supporters into organising riots at various places in Kuala Lumpur on Sunday.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Home Minister, said he believes Anwar would be charged in court for sexual misconduct and other allegations even though he was being detained under the ISA.

But the decision to charge will be made by the prosecutors and the police, he said when asked if Anwar would not be charged for sexual misconduct and treason now that he was being detained under the ISA.

Dr Mahathir said the police was going to charge Anwar in court after completing its investigations but Anwar's actions forced them to make the arrest on Sunday night.

Since his dismissal, Anwar had held rallies at his residence in Bukit Damansara and mosques in the city, and travelled to several states to tell his supporters that there was a high-level conspiracy in the party and the Government to end his political ascend.

Dr Mahathir said he believes Anwar was courting detention under the ISA so that he would not be charged in court for the alleged misconduct, treason and corruption.

"But I believe it is (the police's) intention to bring him to court and charge him through normal (court) procedures. This is something that Anwar doesn't want. He does not want to face an open court and be tried in a real court.

"He wanted to be arrested under the ISA so that he can accuse the Government of being oppressive and dictatorial," he added.

Dr Mahathir said it would not be appropriate if Munawar Anees and Sukma Darmawan (who pleaded guilty in court last Saturday to charges of being sodomised by Anwar) were put on trial while Anwar, who is accused of committing the crime on the two men, is not tried in court.

The Prime Minister said Anwar has his rights, including to appeal.

"We are not denying his rights under the Malaysian laws. We follow the Malaysian laws."

At a suggestion that the court could be biased in its decision, Dr Mahathir reminded the press conference that Umno was declared null and void in 1987 by a Malaysian court.

"I would like to remind that it was a Malaysian court which declared Umno illegal ... I don't know whether there is another instance in world history where the governing party faced such a situation.

Dr Mahathir was also asked about comments made by Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail in an interview that she feared her husband might be injected with the HIV AIDS virus to prove the allegations of sodomy.

"I think she is a doctor. She knows very well that if you inject the virus today you can't prove you have the virus in a day. It takes a long time before a person really show signs of having the HIV virus," the Prime Minister said, adding that this was the first time the Malaysian police have been accused of such.

The Umno president also talked about the difficulties he and other Umno leaders faced in trying to explain to the people about Anwar and the actions taken against the former Umno deputy president.

"It is difficult for me to explain and I think it is also difficult for them (Umno leaders) to explain," he added.

But the Government will continue to explain to the public. At the same time, Dr Mahathir urged the people to abide by the law and let the court decides whether Anwar is guilty or otherwise.

On the special supreme council meeting, Dr Mahathir said all members supported the move to detain Anwar and six others under the ISA for threatening national security.

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