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LEAD Mahathir-perception

ANWAR'S SACKING WILL NOT HAVE LONG-TERM EFFECT ON MALAYSIA

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 10 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today he did not think the sacking of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim from the Cabinet will affect Malaysia's fund-raising efforts to finance economic recovery in the long-term.

"It's not going to affect anybody's perceptions (of Malaysia). There's not going to be a long-term effect because of this little problem," he said.

Dr Mahathir was speaking to newsmen after announcing the appointment of US international financial consultancy firm Salomon Smith Barney as the financial adviser to the government at Carcosa Seri Negara here.

On the possibility of Anwar being arrested, he said the police were continuing their investigations and "I'm sure they will take action when they have sufficient evidence."

Asked about Anwar's challenge that he be charged in court without further delay so that he can defend himself, Dr Mahathir said the former Deputy Prime Minister was now changing his tune.

"Initially he said he didn't have confidence in the courts ... now he wants to go court," he said.

He said Anwar was challenging the authorities while he was surrounded by thousands of supporters at his house.

"He is making the challenge so that people create problems, cause riots," Dr Mahathir added.

Anwar was sacked from the Cabinet and expelled from Umno last week allegedly for having low morals. The accusations arrayed against him range from sodomy to consorting with prostitutes.

Dr Mahathir said he suspected that Anwar would be waiting with about 1,000 or 2,000 of his supporters surrounding him in his house so as to create problems should police come to pick him up.

"And if anybody gets hurt, then he will get full publicity especially in the international press. That is what he wants," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Anwar seemed to consider himself as being different from ordinary citizens of this country.

"Other citizens, if they are arrested, they are arrested and nobody creates any problem but here, he is surrounding himself with a lot of small boys, university students and all that. And he knows that the police cannot do anything without hurting these people.

"And if they (the police) hurt these people, of course people will say 'look, police brutality' ... there is no police brutality," he said.

In fact, said Dr Mahathir, Anwar was making it difficult for the police to carry out their duties.

Asked if Anwar was under house arrest, Dr Mahathir said the former deputy prime minister was actually "arrested" by his own followers who were surrounding him.

"I can assure you that if you want to walk alone in any part of Malaysia, you can. But if he drags around 1,000 people who are willing to create problems whenever legal action is taken against him, then in that sense he has been arrested by them already," he said.

Dr Mahathir said it appeared that Anwar now has lost his freedom.

"He has no freedom of his own. He has decided that his followers should surround him and keep him there (in his house)," he said.

On allegations by Anwar that he no longer had access to the local

media, Dr Mahathir said he did not know about it.

However, the Prime Minister said he thought that Anwar was receiving a lot more publicity than he did.

"And certainly very positive publicity in the international media. I never get that," he said.

Dr Mahathir said recently the foreign media "wrote some nasty things about me which is not fair at all."

"So, I also should feel that I should be surrounded by my followers because of the attack by these (foreign) media," he said.

Asked how he felt being attacked by the man whom he had groomed to take over the country's leadership, Dr Mahathir said he had been "attacked" by (other former) deputy prime ministers before.

"It is a common occurrence, part of the problems politicians must be prepared to face."

On the presence of some Umno leaders in Anwar's house, Dr Mahathir said Umno had not banned its leaders from seeing him.

"There is no ban. (If) they want to go, they can go," he said.

When asked if their presence could be construed as them supporting Anwar, the Prime Minister, who is also Umno president, said: "Two or three people, yes. But we (Umno) have 2,400,000 members. So you can spare that two or three people. They can stay there permanently."

When asked how long the authorities were planning to allow Anwar to continue with his political "ceramah" at his house, Dr Mahathir said it was done within the country's democratic system.

"If we stop, then the media, especially the foreign media will say that we are repressive. So, we'll have to put up with it. It's something that one has to submit to if one believes in democracy," Dr Mahathir said. Dr Mahathir said he had asked Umno divisional leaders to hold special prayers to seek the truth in the charges of immorality against Anwar.

"If I am right, that's okay. If he is right, then he is right," Dr Mahathir said, adding that he did not ask for prayers in support of himself.

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