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Dr M: Anwar courting arrest so as to be a martyr

BANGI, Tues. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today his former deputy Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim was courting arrest with his activities and was trying to divert attention from his personal problems by raising the issue of reforms.

Speaking to newsmen after opening the general assembly of the Commonwealth Association of Public Administration and Management (CAPAM), Dr Mahathir said there were no restrictions on Anwar's movements.

"And I must say he is trying his best to force the Government to arrest him because then he'll be a martyr and the foreign Press will publish all kinds of things about this authoritarian Government of Malaysia," said Dr Mahathir.

Asked about Anwar's plans for a reformation movement and a nationwide tour to clear his name, Dr Mahathir said they were attempts to divert the public's attention from his personal problems.

"What is the reason for a road show? We took action against him because of his personal problems, the problem of his morals which were not good.

"The (reform) movement is just a ploy to deceive the people.

"I don't think Malaysians want someone who has such low morals (and) who is involved in activities that should not involve a leader at that level."

He was also asked if the Government was concerned that Anwar seemed to be attracting a lot of support from university students.

"When you go and pick up university students to support you, to lend moral courage to you, then I think you are almost bankrupt," Dr Mahathir said.

When asked by a Taiwan television reporter if there would be disorder in the country because of tension between him and Anwar, he said he did not think so.

"As you can see, the fact that he has been removed has not affected the stock market. In Malaysia, we do not expect that kind of trouble because Malaysians are generally peaceful people," Dr Mahathir said.

When asked if any action would be taken against Umno Youth chief Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi who has not made clear his stand on the issue, Dr Mahathir said there were no plans to do so and that it was up to Umno members.

The Prime Minister also maintained his stand not to appoint a deputy until the next Umno elections scheduled for next year.

Asked who will take over should anything happen to him, Dr Mahathir said: "The party will decide. We have vice-presidents. They will decide who should be the successor if I pop off."

When it was pointed out to him that there were three vice-presidents and that there may be disagreement among them, he said:

"There will be some problems at first. I am quite sure in the end they will decide on one of them and in the tradition of Umno, after we have decided, we close ranks."

The three vice-presidents are Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak and former Menteri Besar Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib who is on leave from his position following charges of falsely declaring the money he took into Australia in Dec 1996 and failing to declare more than A\$1.2 million when he left the country.

He was acquitted on both the charges on May 30.

Asked if he planned to appoint an Acting Deputy Prime Minister, he said:  
"No, because if we appoint one, it would be difficult to disappoint  
him," he said, adding that the Umno elections would not be brought  
forward.

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