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Mahathir-Court

COURT PROCEEDINGS IN MALAYSIA TAKE TOO LONG, SAYS PM

By: Azman Ujang

TOKYO, Oct 18 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that most times the government would rather not bring up certain cases or disputes in court as court proceedings in Malaysia normally take a long time.

As such, he said, the Cabinet for instance, would much prefer to make decisions pertaining to government matters or related matters to ensure the smooth-running of the administration.

"Normally, court proceedings even take years...following a decision, there comes the appeal process and even this takes a long time," he said when speaking to some 250 Malaysian students at the Malaysian embassy, here.

Dr Mahathir, who is on a five-day visit to Japan, was responding to a question by a student who wanted to know why Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim was sacked as Deputy Prime Minister even before his case had been brought to court.

He said that it was his prerogative as Prime Minister to sack or drop a minister without having to wait for the decision of the court for those facing court action.

"In the Cabinet, we don't wait for the court to make its decision. It is within our right...if we were to wait for the court, we couldn't have any work done," he said.

The Prime Minister said: "If we need to refer everything to the court, to the lawyers, then face a hearing...no decisions could be made."

Dr Mahathir said that the dismissal of a minister was a normal practice whether in Britain or in Japan and other countries.

Anwar, who was sacked on Sept 2, had pleaded not guilty to 10 charges of sexual improprieties and corrupt practices and would be tried in the Kuala Lumpur High Court on Nov 2.

Asked regarding Anwar's trial, Dr Mahathir said: "This case, I don't know when it will be disposed."

Dr Mahathir also said that the assumption that in Malaysia the court was pro-government was not true as there had been court decisions to the contrary.

He said that a classic case which might not have happened in other countries was the High Court decision declaring a political party which had long been in power in the country, unlawful.

He was referring to the court decision in 1988 declaring Umno unlawful when the party was found to have allowed delegates from several branches which were invalid, to vote in the party election that year.

Referring to pro-Anwar demonstrations following his dismissal as Deputy Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir said such demonstrations were aimed at forcing him to step down like what had happened in Indonesia where they led to the downfall of President Suharto.

"In Malaysia, a government could be ousted but only through democratic means, which is through a general election," he said.

At the gathering, the Prime Minister spoke at length on the situation in Malaysia especially the economic crisis and the political turmoil following Anwar's sacking.

In reply to a question, Dr Mahathir admitted that he and his former deputy had different views and approaches in dealing with the economic

crisis facing the country but said that Anwar's dismissal was not related to the matter.

He said that his decision to remove Anwar from his posts was also not politically motivated because having long been in politics, he did not fear the possibility of Anwar (before his dismissal) challenging him for the post of Umno president in the party election next year.

Dr Mahathir said he found out that in the last Umno general assembly in June this year, there was a plan by some delegates to "boo" him during his presidential address.

"But this did not happen and his speech was accepted well by the delegates. I have no fear. I'm not worried...I don't think I could be rejected so easily," he said.

This was followed by a pledge by several students to give their support to him. They also expressed their wish for him to continue to lead the country.

A woman student boldly said: "I pray to God that Datuk Seri will have a long life because at this point in time, nobody can yet replace Datuk Seri."

This was met by loud applause by the other students who are mostly studying in Japan under sponsorships by Japanese companies operating in Malaysia and will be serving with the companies on completion of their studies.

Dr Mahathir also spoke on the confusion among investors including those in Japan over Malaysia's capital control measures including pegging the ringgit to RM3.80 per the US dollar.

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The measure was only meant to curb currency traders from selling the ringgit following manipulative attacks on the ringgit and the stock market.

"If we were to impose control on capital flow, we cannot survive because Malaysia is a trading nation," he said.

The Prime Minister said that currency traders were now not able to undermine the nation's economy and this meant that Malaysia was in control of its economy.

He said it also meant that Malaysia could change the rate of the ringgit to RM2.50 or RM4.00 per the US dollar if it was found to be competitive.

"In this way we can protect our own interest and no trader will be able to undermine the nation's economy," he added.

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