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Dr M: Let the court decide on Anwar (HL)

Rashid Yusof

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today advised supporters of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim not to obstruct the legal process, but instead let the court prove the veracity of the allegations against him.

Dr Mahathir said there was no need for demonstrations and reiterated the Government's assurance that there would be an open trial for Anwar.

He said there could not be justice if the judge was "interrupted and threatened".

"Don't disrupt the process of law. Allow the court to decide. If he is found not guilty, then support him without fear," the Prime Minister told a Press conference at Sri Perdana, his official residence.

The Press conference was called to clarify why Anwar had not been charged as there had been confusion and questions raised over this.

Dr Mahathir said the authorities had wanted to charge Anwar this week but were prevented from doing so by demonstrations staged by Anwar's supporters.

He regretted that before Anwar could be tried, he had incited his supporters to hold demonstrations and to cause disturbances if he was taken to court.

He said the police had exercised restraint as they feared possible injuries in trying to disperse the demonstrators.

In turn, such an occurrence would be exploited by the foreign media to show the world there was police brutality, he said.

The Prime Minister said this could possibly earn Anwar a lot of sympathy abroad among those not aware of what he has done.

Dr Mahathir said Anwar himself hoped that the trial would be disrupted and that if there were Indonesian-style riots, the trial could not be conducted in a proper manner.

And, the riots could spread like what had happened in Indonesia and ultimately, the Government will be ousted, he added.

"Thus, there will be no trial at all. And he would be freed just like that and his offences will not be exposed.

"This is the plan hatched by Anwar to avoid a trial. That's why police are careful and not using force unless it cannot be avoided."

Asked what was his advice to supporters of Anwar when faced with various rumours spread through leaflets and the Internet, Dr Mahathir appealed to them not to believe the contents because they were not true.

He cited the rumour of Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak resigning, but the Education Minister had made it clear that he has no such intention.

The Prime Minister said there was also talk that there would be a major demonstration on Monday to drum up support for Anwar.

Dr Mahathir also spoke of adverse foreign media reports, like attempts to depict the Government as authoritarian.

He said there was a possibility that such a situation would be used to initiate economic sanctions against Malaysia.

He cited a Reuters report yesterday quoting World Bank vice-president chief economist Joseph Stiglitz as saying "attempts to silence political dissent may cause investors to shun the country as they did South Africa over apartheid."

Dr Mahathir said this could be an attempt to see that measures to safeguard the country would fail.

Asked if there were third parties out to exploit the situation, he said there were people who wished to see Umno divided, with some members backing Anwar.

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