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Dr Mahathir: Action will be taken according to the law

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad described his former deputy Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, who today held two illegal assemblies, as a desperate man who is breaking the law.

He said whatever action to be taken against Anwar would be carried out according to the law.

"The due process of the law will have to take place. I am quite sure the people implementing this know their job ... they will do what is required of them," he said at a Press conference after visiting the Commonwealth Games Main Press Centre at Mint Hotel.

Dr Mahathir said everybody had to face the same law as none was privileged, adding that in Anwar's case, it was up to the police to decide on when to act.

Anwar and thousands of his supporters today turned up at Masjid Negara and later marched to the Merdeka Square despite not obtaining any permit to hold the assemblies.

The Prime Minister was earlier asked as to when Anwar would be arrested following the admission of guilt by two people in the Sessions Court yesterday that they had allowed themselves to be sodomised by Anwar.

Dr Munawar Ahmad Anees, 51, and Anwar's adopted brother Sukma Darmawan Sasmitaat Madja, 37, were sentenced to six months' jail each after they pleaded guilty to the offence.

Anwar was sacked as Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister on Sept 2 and from Umno on Sept 4 for alleged moral misconduct.

To a suggestion that the police were waiting for the Commonwealth Games to end and the departure of the large foreign Press corps before arresting Anwar, Dr Mahathir said as far as he was concerned, if something that needed to be done was right, then it would be carried out regardless of the timing.

"If they wanted to wait for the Games to end, I don't think they would have arrested the two people. The police have their own timetable ... we are not manipulating anything."

The Prime Minister said the desperation could also be seen from Anwar's call for him to step down and his criticism that the police were acting like the Nazi's secret police, Gestapo.

"I understand his feelings. He has been dismissed but cannot dismiss me, so it is entirely logical for him to ask for my resignation.

"A man in that kind of situation will make all kinds of accusations but the main point is you have to prove them," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the fact remained that Anwar was the one breaking the law by holding illegal rallies, an act he had often criticised when he was in the government.

He said Anwar often claimed that he would be arrested under the Internal Security Act but this did not happen.

"Of course this is not noticed. Lots of people think those in the Opposition have privileges which people in the Government do not have.

"We have arrested a Chief Minister and MPs from the party but nobody noticed that and (continue) to say that we are only going after Opposition members."

In fact, Dr Mahathir said no one had been spared including members of the ruling party holding high positions.

On whether he was surprised over the details emerging from yesterday's

court cases involving the two men, the Prime Minister said the element of surprise was fading because he had now accepted the fact that Anwar behaved that way.

"At first of course I told the people who brought this to my attention that they were really trying to get rid of him but after some time, the evidence was too strong and so I had to accept them and take action. I think this is something that apparently he indulged in to my regret."

Asked whether he believed the admission of the two, Dr Mahathir said nobody would come up and confess something that was very damaging to themselves.

"In fact I believe Anwar felt quite safe because he thought these people will never admit to something that they would be very ashamed of but as it is, they have made an admission.

"Nobody in the right mind would want to damage themselves by making such a confession."

On Anwar's contention that the confessions were made under duress, the Prime Minister said anyone could verify this by asking the two whether they had been tortured.

The Prime Minister was also asked by a foreign reporter on how long he would like to see his former deputy in jail.

"I do not enjoy this. I wish he had not done this and succeeded me and everything would have been fine.

"But here I have this thing thrown into my face, I have economic problems to deal with, Sukom, Apec is coming. But it happened," he said.

On whether the capital control measures introduced by Malaysia on Sept 1 could become a model, Dr Mahathir said these were done to protect the country's economy.

"We are not asking that we should serve as a model for anyone. What other people want to do is entirely their business but we think we are doing the right thing."

On the possibility of others emulating Malaysia's moves, Dr Mahathir cautioned that as the situation differed from country to country, copying measures done by others was not a good way of managing things.

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