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Foreigners free to attend Anwar's trial (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that foreigners were free to attend Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's trial which begins on Nov 2, but no one would be given special treatment.

He said the Government would also not accord observer status to any foreigner as this would impose undue pressure on the court.

He said their reason for attending the trial was not because they were interested in whether Anwar was guilty or not, but to put the Government and the court on trial.

"And because of that, we are not going to entertain any specific group coming here and wanting to get special treatment as observers.

"Of course, they can come here, but they will be treated as all others," Dr Mahathir told a Press conference at the Prime Minister's Department.

The Press conference was called to brief the local media on his five-day working visit to Japan. He returned at 1.30 this morning.

Several groups, including the Justice International - Commission on Human Rights, the London-based international lawyers' organisation, have said they would be attending Anwar's trial as observers.

Fourteen Congressmen from the Philippines have also said they would be coming. The group, which would include a son of former President Corazon Aquino, has openly expressed support for Anwar.

"We are not stopping them from attending the proceedings, but they are not coming as observers. We find that observers will have the effect of pressuring the court into accommodating them," Dr Mahathir said, adding that this by itself was interference in Malaysia's judicial system.

Anwar had pleaded not guilty to five counts of corruption and five of having unnatural sex. Four corruption charges will be heard in the High Court from Nov 2 to 14.

Anwar was sacked as Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister on Sept 2 and expelled from Umno the following day.

Dr Mahathir also took a swipe at the foreign media saying that it had now put the Malaysian Government and the judiciary on trial.

"While we in Malaysia are not allowed to talk about the specific charges against Anwar, the foreigners are quite free to pass judgment on the court and the Malaysian Government.

"The foreign Press is free to influence the court to obtain the decision which is favourable to them.

"Of course, Anwar is the darling of the West and therefore they defend him," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said former Hong Kong Governor Chris Patten had written in a recent article that Anwar was "beaten to pulp" while in police custody.

"But we know Anwar's actual condition in prison and that he is well. This is the kind of propaganda practised by the Western media to influence the court," Dr Mahathir said.

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