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Freedom of speech not eroded, says PM

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JITRA, Mon. - The decision of the Court of Appeal last week to impose a jail sentence on Kota Melaka MP Lim Guan Eng was purely a judicial process and did not erode freedom of speech in the country, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"There is no erosion of freedom of speech. When you make a baseless allegation, the law must take its course," he said when asked by reporters to comment on Amnesty International's claim that Lim's conviction reflected an erosion of freedom of speech in Malaysia and the case was politically motivated.

Dr Mahathir had earlier chaired the Kubang Pasu Umno divisional meeting.

Lim, who is DAP deputy secretary-general, was sentenced to 18 months' jail by the Court of Appeal for printing false news and inciting the public in 1995.

Stressing justice must be carried out fairly regardless of one's political affiliation, Dr Mahathir said:

"Sometimes in the effort to prove the allegation (of injustice), there were courts in Malaysia which intentionally did not pass any sentences because it involved a member of the opposition party.

"This had happened ... when a member of an opposition party was found guilty, he was given a light sentence.

"However, when it involved a member of the Government, and as if to prove the court is free, he was given a stiffer sentence.

"Justice must be carried out fairly whether it involves a member of the opposition or a Government party."

Dr Mahathir said it was not fair to deny justice merely to prove to the world that there was freedom in Malaysia.

On the allegation the case against Lim was politically motivated, Dr Mahathir said: "I cannot say because every time the opposition kena (is convicted), it is seen as politically motivated but you can see through the history of this country how many Menteri Besar and Ministers yang kena (convicted).

"In the past, Rahman Talib pun kena. He was a Minister but he also faced the consequences and how many Menteri Besar had to resign. It is all the same."

Rahman Talib was Education Minister in 1964 when he resigned from the Cabinet after losing a libel and slander case against People's Progressive Party secretary-general D.R. Seenivasagam who had made allegations of corruption against Rahman.

Asked whether the Lim issue was exaggerated, Dr Mahathir said the allegation was aimed at undermining and reflecting Asia as undemocratic.

"Actually corruption occurs everywhere and there is no exception to any country and in some countries, it is worse than Asia," he said, stressing that sanctions imposed on some countries were also a form of injustice.

On the just concluded Umno divisional elections, Dr Mahathir said the meetings were generally smooth although there were some reports of malpractices.

He said the party would also act against those found guilty of money politics and other malpractices.

"Even now investigations are being conducted by the party and also by the Anti-Corruption Agency."

Asked to comment on many being sceptical the party would investigate and

act against those involved in malpractices, the party president said: "We are not experts in this field. We can only question people and scrutinise the reports and available proof."

He added the party would also investigate an allegation that RM1 million was deposited into the account of a former State Executive Councillor by a member of his division.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir gave away four head of cattle for Hari Raya Aidiladha tomorrow.

The cattle were handed over to mosque officials of Pendang, Kampung Titi Gajah, Kampung Padang Limau and 6th Battalion of the Royal Malay Regiment at the Tok Jalai army camp in Kepala Batas.

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